

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Zadspram

Article

Talk

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Look for Zadspram on one of Wikipedia's sister projects:

Wiktionary (dictionary)

Wikibooks (textbooks)

Wikiquote (quotations)

Wikisource (library)

Wikiversity (learning resources)

Commons (media)

Wikivoyage (travel guide)

Wikinews (news source)

Wikidata (linked database)

Wikispecies (species directory)

Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name. Please search for Zadspram in Wikipedia to check for alternative titles or spellings.

You need to log in or create an account and be autoconfirmed to create new articles. Alternatively, you can use the article wizard to submit a draft for review, or request a new article.

Search for "Zadspram" in existing articles.

Look for pages within Wikipedia that link to this title.

Other reasons this message may be displayed:

If a page was recently created here, it may not be visible yet because of a delay in updating the database; wait a few minutes or try the purge function.

Titles on Wikipedia are case sensitive except for the first character; please check alternative capitalizations and consider adding a redirect here to the

correct title.

If the page has been deleted, check the deletion log, and see Why was the page I created deleted?

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Robert Charles Zaehner

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

R. C. Zaehner (1972)[1][2]

Robert Charles Zaehner (8 April 1913 – 24 November 1974) was a British academic whose field of study was Eastern religions. He understood the original languages of various sacred texts, including Sanskrit, Pali, and Arabic. At Oxford University, his first writings were on the Zoroastrian religion and its texts. Starting in World War II, he served as an intelligence officer in Iran. Appointed Spalding Professor at Oxford in 1952, his books addressed such subjects as mystical experience (articulating a widely cited typology), Hinduism, comparative religion, Christianity and other religions, and ethics. He translated the Bhagavad Gita, providing an extensive commentary based on Hindu tradition and sources. His last books addressed similar popular culture issues, leading to his talks on the BBC. He published under the name R. C. Zaehner.[3]

Life and career

Early years

Born on 8 April 1913 in Sevenoaks, Kent, he was the son of Swiss–German immigrants to England. Zaehner "was bilingual in French and English from early childhood. He remained an excellent linguist all his life." [4][5] Educated at the nearby Tonbridge School, he was admitted to Christ Church, Oxford, where he studied Greek and Latin as an undergraduate. It was during this time that he underwent a spontaneous mystical experience, detached of any religious content.[6] He then went on to study ancient Persian including Avestan, gaining first class honours in Oriental Languages. During 1936–37 at Cambridge University he studied Pahlavi, another ancient Iranian language, with Sir Harold Bailey, whom Zaehner held in high esteem.[7] He then began work on his book Zurvan, a Zoroastrian Dilemma, a study of the pre-Islamic religion of Iran.[8][9]

Zaehner enjoyed "a prodigious gift for languages". He later acquired a reading knowledge of Sanskrit (for Hindu scriptures), Pali (for Buddhist),

and Arabic (for Islamic).[10] In 1939 he taught as a research lecturer at Christ Church, Oxford. During this period, he read the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the Sufi poet Rumi, and the Hindu Upanishads. Zaehner came then to adopt a personal brand of "nature mysticism". Yet his spiritual progression led him a few years later to convert to Christianity, becoming a Roman Catholic while stationed in Iran.[11]

British intelligence

During World War II starting in 1943, he served as a British intelligence officer at their Embassy in Tehran. Often he was stationed in the field among the mountain tribes of northern Iran. After the war he also performed a more diplomatic role at the Tehran embassy.[8][12] Decades later another British intelligence officer, Peter Wright, described his activities:

"I studied Zaehner's Personal File. He was responsible for MI6 counterintelligence in Persia during the war. It was difficult and dangerous work. The railway lines into Russia, carrying vital military supplies, were key targets for German sabotage. Zaehner was perfectly equipped for the job, speaking the local dialects fluently, and much of his time was spent undercover, operating in the murky and cutthroat world of countersabotage. By the end of the war his task was even more fraught. The Russians themselves were trying to gain control of the railway, and Zaehner had to work behind Russian lines, continuously at risk of betrayal and murder by pro-German or pro-Russian... ."[13]

Zaehner continued in Iran until 1947 as press attaché in the British Embassy, [14] and as an MI6 officer. He then resumed his academic career at Oxford doing research on Zoroastrianism. During 1949, however, he was relocated to Malta where he trained anti-Communist Albanians. By 1950 he had secured an Oxford appointment as lecturer in Persian literature. Again in 1951–1952 he returned to Iran for government service. Prof. Nancy Lambton, who had run British propaganda in Iran during the war, recommended him for the Embassy position. Journalist Christopher de Bellaigue describes Robin Zaehner as "a born networker who knew everyone who mattered in

Tehran" with a taste for gin and opium. "When Kingsley Martin, the editor of the New Statesman, asked Zaehner at a cocktail party in Tehran what book he might read to enlarge his understanding of Iran, Zaehner suggested Alice through the Looking Glass." [15][16][17][18]

Zaehner publicly held the rank of Counsellor in the British Embassy in Tehran. In fact, he continued as an MI6 officer. During the Abadan Crisis he was assigned to prolong the Shah's royal hold on the Sun Throne against the republican challenge led by Mohammed Mossadegh, then the Prime Minister. The crisis involved the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company which had been in effect nationalised by Mossadegh. Zaehner thus became engaged in the failed 1951 British effort to topple the government of Iran and return oil production to that entity controlled by the British government. [19] "[T]he plot to overthrow Mossadegh and give the oilfields back to the AIOC was in the hands of a British diplomat called Robin Zaehner, later professor of Eastern religions at Oxford." [20][21][22] Such Anglo and later American interference in Iran, which eventually reinstalled the Shah, has been widely criticized. [23][24][25]

In the 1960s, MI5 counterintelligence officer Peter Wright questioned Zaehner about floating allegations that he had doubled as a spy for the Soviet Union, harming British intelligence operations in Iran and Albania during the period following World War II. Zaehner is described as "a small, wiry-looking man, clothed in the distracted charm of erudition." In his 1987 book *Spycatcher* Wright wrote that Zaehner's humble demeanor and candid denial convinced him that the Oxford don had remained loyal to Britain. Wright notes that "I felt like a heel" for confronting Zaehner. [26]

Although in the intelligence service for the benefit of his Government, on later reflection Zaehner did not understand the utilitarian activities he performed as being altogether ennobling. In such "Government service abroad", he wrote, "truth is seen as the last of the virtues and to lie comes to be a second nature. It was, then, with relief that I returned to academic life because, it seemed to me, if ever there was a profession concerned with a single-minded search for truth, it was the profession of the scholar." [27][28]

Prof. Jeffrey Kripal discusses "Zaehner's extraordinary truth telling" which may appear "politically incorrect". The "too truthful professor" might be seen as "a redemptive or compensatory act" for "his earlier career in dissimulation and deception" as a spy.[29][30]

Oxford professor

Zaehner worked at the university until his death, aged 61, on 24 November 1974 in Oxford, when he collapsed in the street while walking on his way to Sunday evening mass.[31] The cause of death was a heart attack.[32][33]

University work

Before the war Zaehner had lectured at Oxford University. Returning to Christ Church several years after the war, he continued work on his Zurvan book,[34] and lectured in Persian literature. His reputation then "rested on articles on Zoroastrianism, mainly philological" written before the war.[35]

In 1952 Zaehner was elected Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics to succeed the celebrated professor Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who had resigned to become vice-president (later President) of India.[36][37][38] Zaehner had applied for this position. Radhakrishnan previously had been advancing a harmonizing viewpoint with regard to the study of comparative religions, and the academic chair had a subtext of being "founded to propagate a kind of universalism". Zaehner's inaugural lecture was unconventional in content. He delivered a strong yet witty criticism of "universalism" in religion.[39]

It drew controversy. Prof. Michael Dummett opines that what concerned Zaehner was "to make it clear from the start of his tenure of the Chair that he was nobody else's man." [40][41] Zaehner continued an interest in Zoroastrian studies, publishing his Zurvan book and two others on the subject during the 1950s.[42] Since 1952, however, he had turned his primary attention further East. "After my election to the Spalding Chair, I decided to

devote myself mainly to the study of Indian religions in accordance with the founder's wishes." [43] He served Oxford in this academic chair, while also a fellow at All Souls College, until his death in 1974, and never married. [8] [44]

In his influential 1957 book *Mysticism Sacred and Profane*, Zaehner discussed this traditional, cross-cultural spiritual practice. Based on mystical writings, he offered an innovative typology that became widely discussed in academic journals. He also analyzed claims that mescaline use fit into this spiritual quest. His conclusion was near dismissive. Yet he revisited his harsh words on the naïveté of drug mysticism in his 1972 book *Zen, Drugs and Mysticism*. His warnings became somewhat qualified by some prudent suggestions. He carefully distinguished between drug-induced states and religious mysticism. Then the BBC began asking him to talk on the radio, where he acquired a following. He was invited abroad to lecture. [45] [46]

His delivery in Scotland of the Gifford Lectures led him to write perhaps his most magisterial book. Zaehner traveled twice to the University of St. Andrews during the years 1967 to 1969. The subject he chose concerned the convoluted and intertwined history of the different world religions during the long duration of their mutual co-existence. He described the interactions as both fiercely contested and relatively cross-cultivating, in contrast to other periods of a more sovereign isolation. The lectures were later published in 1970 "just four years before his death" by Oxford University as *Concordant Discord. The interdependence of faiths*. [47] [48]

Peer descriptions

As a professor Zaehner "had a great facility for writing, and an enormous appetite for work... [also] a talent for friendship, a deep affection for a number of particular close friends and an appreciation of human personality, especially for anything bizarre or eccentric". Nonetheless, "he passed a great deal of his time alone, most of it in his study working." [49]

An American professor described Zaehner in a different light: "The small,

birdlike Zaehner, whose rheumy, color-faded eyes darted about in a clay colored face, misted blue from the smoke of Gauloises cigarettes, could be fearsome indeed. He was a volatile figure, worthy of the best steel of his age."[50]

His colleague in Iran, Prof. Ann K. S. Lambton of SOAS, recalled, "He did not, perhaps, suffer fools gladly, but for the serious student he would take immense pains". Prof. Zaehner was "an entertaining companion" with "many wildly funny" stories, "a man of great originality, not to say eccentricity."[51]

"Zaehner was a scholar who turned into something different, something more important than a scholar," according to Michael Dummett, a professor of philosophy at Oxford, who wanted to call him a penseur [French: a thinker]. With insight and learning (and his war-time experience) Zaehner shed light on key issues in contemporary spiritual life, writing abundantly. "His talent lay in seeing what to ask, rather than in how to answer... ."[52]

About Zaehner's writing style, Wilfred Cantwell Smith compared it to a merry-go-round, so that the reader is not sure he is "actually going somewhere. A merry-go-round of such engaging colour, boisterous sound effects, and bouncing intellectual activity, however, is itself perhaps no mean achievement."[53]

In theology he challenged the ecumenical trend that strove to somehow see a uniformity in all religions. He acted not out of an ill will, but from a conviction that any fruitful dialogue between religions must be based on a "pursuit of truth". If such profound dialogue rested on a false or a superficial "harmony and friendship" it would only foster hidden misunderstandings, Zaehner thought, which would ultimately result in a deepening mistrust.[54][55]

His writings

Zoroastrian studies

Zurvan

Initially Zaehner's reputation rested on his studies of Zoroastrianism, at first articles mostly on philology in academic journals. He labored for many years on a scholarly work, his Zurvan, a Zoroastrian dilemma (1955). This book provides an original discussions of an influential theological deviation from the Zoroastrian orthodoxy of ancient Persia's Achaemenid Empire, which was a stark, ethical dualism. Zurvanism was promoted by the Sasanian Empire (224–651) which arose later during Roman times. Until the Muslim conquest, Zurvanism in the Persian world became established and disestablished by turns.[56][57][58]

Zurvan was an innovation analogous to Zoroastrian original doctrine. The prophet Zoroaster preached that the benevolent Ahura Mazda (the "Wise Lord"), as the creator God, fashioned both Spenta Mainyu (the Holy Spirit), and Angra Mainyu (the Aggressive Spirit) who chose to turn evil. These two created Spirits were called twins, one good, one evil. Over the centuries Ahura Mazda and his "messenger" the good Spenta Mainyu became conflated and identified; hence, the creator Ahura Mazda began to be seen as the twin of the evil Angra Mainyu, where Ahura Mazda was later known as Ohrmazd, and Angra Mainyu became Ahriman.[59][60][61][62] It was in this guise that Zoroastrianism became the state religion in Achaemenid Persia. Without fully abandoning dualism, some started to consider Zurvan (Time) as the underlying cause of both the benevolent Ahura Mazda and the evil Angra Mainyu. The picture is complicated by very different schools of Zurvanism, and contesting Zoroastrian sects.

Zurvan could be described as divinized Time (Zaman). With Time as 'father' twins came into being: the ethical, bountiful Ohrmazd, who was worshipped, and his satanic antagonist Ahriman, against whom believers fought. As Infinite Time, Zurvan rose supreme "above Ohrmazd and Ahriman" and stood "above good and evil". This aggravated the traditional 'orthodox' Zoroastrians (the Mazdean ethical dualists).[63][64] Zoroastrian cosmology

understood that "finite Time comes into existence out of Infinite Time". During the 12,000 year period of finite Time (Zurvan being both kinds of Time), human history occurs, the fight against Ahriman starts, and the final victory of Ohrmazd is achieved. Yet throughout, orthodox Mazdeans insisted, it is Ohrmazd who remains supreme, not Zurvan. On the other hand, his adherents held that Zurvan was God of Time, Space, Wisdom, and Power, and the Lord of Death, of Order, and of Fate.[65]

Teachings of the Magi

The Teachings of the Magi (1956)[66] was Zaehner's second of three books on Zoroastrianism. It presented the "main tenets" of the religion in the Sasanid era, during the reign of Shapur II, a 4th-century King. Its chief sources were Pahlavi books written a few centuries later by Zoroastrians. Each of its ten chapters contains Zaehner's descriptive commentaries, illustrated by his translations from historic texts. Chapter IV, "The Necessity of Dualism" is typical, half being the author's narrative and half extracts from a Pahlavi work, here the Shikand Gumanī Vizar by Mardān Farrukh.[67]

Dawn and Twilight

In his The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (1961), Zaehner adopted a chronological dichotomy. He first explores origins, the founding of the religion by its prophet Zoroaster. He notes that the Gathas, the earliest texts in the Avesta, make it obvious that "Zoroaster met with very stiff opposition from the civil and ecclesiastical authorities when once he had proclaimed his mission." "His enemies... supported the ancient national religion." On moral and ecological grounds, Zoroaster favored the "settled pastoral and agricultural community" as against the "predatory, marauding tribal societies". His theological and ethical dualism advocated for "the followers of Truth the life-conserving and life-enhancing forces" and against the "destructive forces" of the Lie.[68] For the dates of the prophet's life, Zaehner adopted the traditional 6th century BCE dates.[69][70][71][72][73]

Zoroaster reformed the old polytheistic religion by making Ahura Mazda

[the Wise Lord] the Creator, the only God. An innovation by Zoroaster was the abstract notions, namely, the Holy Spirit, and the Amesha Spentas (Good Mind, Truth, Devotion, Dominion, Wholeness, Immortality). Zaehner interpreted them not as new substitutes for the excluded old gods, "but as part of the divine personality itself" which may also serve "as mediating functions between God and man". The Amesha Spentas are "aspects of God, but aspects in which man too can share." [74] Angra Mainyu was the dualistic evil. [75] Dating to before the final parting of ways of the Indo-Iranians, the Hindus had two classes of gods, the asuras (e.g., Varuna) and the devas (e.g., Indra). Later following the invasion of India the asuras sank to the rank of demon. Au contraire, in Iran the ahuras were favored, while the daevas fell and opposed truth, spurred in part by Zoroaster's reform. In the old Iranian religion, an ahura [lord] was concerned with "the right ordering of the cosmos". [76][77][78][79]

In Part II, Zaehner discussed the long decline of Zoroastrianism. [80] There arose the teachings about Zurvan i Akanarak [Infinite Time]. The Sasanid state's ideological rationale was sourced in Zoroastrian cosmology and sense of virtue. The Amesha Spentas provided spiritual support for human activities according to an articulated mean (e.g., "the just equipoise between excess and deficiency", Zoroastrian "law", and "wisdom or reason"). As an ethical principle the mean followed the contours of the 'treaty' between Ohrmazd [Ahura Mazda] and Ahriman [Angra Mainyu], which governed their struggle in Finite Time. Other doctrines came into prominence, such as those about the future saviour Saoshyans (Zoroaster himself or his posthumous son). Then after the final triumph of the Good Religion the wise lord Ohrmazd "elevates the whole material creation into the spiritual order, and there the perfection that each created thing has as it issues from the hand of God is restored to it" in the Frashkart or "Making Excellent". [81][82] [83]

Articles, chapters

Zaehner contributed other work regarding Zoroaster and the religion began in ancient Iran. The article "Zoroastrianism" was included in a double-columned book he edited, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, first

published in 1959.[84] Also were his several articles on the persistence in popular culture of the former national religion, "Zoroastrian survivals in Iranian folklore".[85] Chapters, in whole or part, on Zoroastrianism appeared in a few of his other books: *At Sundry Times* (1958), aka *The Comparison of Religions* (1962);[86] *The Convergent Spirit*, aka *Matter and Spirit* (1963);[87] and *Concordant Discord* (1970).[88]

Comparative religion

In addition to the two titles below, other works of Zaehner are comparative or have a significant comparative element.[89] Among these are: *Concordant Discord* (1970),[90] and *Our Savage God* (1974).[91]

Choice of perspective

In the west the academic field of comparative religion at its origins inherited an 'enlightenment' ideal of an objective, value-neutral, yet 'secular' rationalism. Traditional Christian and Jewish writings, however, initially provided much of the source material, as did classical literature, these being later joined by non-western religious texts and field studies,[92] then eventually by ethnological studies of folk religions.[93][94] The privileged 'enlightenment' orientation, self-defined as purely reasonable, in practice fell short of being neutral, and itself became progressively contested by different camps.[95] As to value-neutral criteria, Zaehner situated himself roughly as follows:

"Any man with any convictions at all is liable to be influenced by them even when he tries to adopt an entirely objective approach; but let him recognize this from the outset and guard against it. If he does this, he will at least be less liable to deceive himself and others." "Of the books I have written some are intended to be objective; others, quite frankly, are not." "In all my writings on comparative religion my aim has been increasingly to show that there is a coherent pattern in religious history. For me the centre of coherence can only be Christ." Yet "I have rejected as irrelevant to my theme almost everything that would find a natural place in a theological seminary,

that is, Christian theology, modern theology in particular." "For what, then, do I have sympathy, you may well ask. Quite simply, for the 'great religions' both of East and West, expressed... in those texts that each religion holds most sacred and in the impact that these have caused." [96][97][98]

Accordingly, for his primary orientation Zaehner chose from among the active participants: Christianity in its Catholic manifestation. Yet the academic Zaehner also employed a type of comparative analysis, e.g., often drawing on Zoroastrian or Hindu, or Jewish or Islamic views for contrast, for insight. [99][100] Often he combined comparison with a default 'modernist' critique, which included psychology or cultural evolution. [101] [102] Zaehner's later works are informed by Vatican II (1962-1965) and tempered by *Nostra aetate*. [103]

Pursuit of his chosen point of view was not without criticism, including from other academics. [104][105][106][107] Nor did Zaehner's Christian belief prevent him from disclosing his own troubles and truth-be-told criticism of disasters in the historical church. [108]

At Sundry Times

In his 1958 book *At Sundry Times*. An essay in the comparison of religions, [109] Zaehner came to grips with "the problem of how a Christian should regard the non-Christian religions and how, if at all, he could correlate them into his own" (p. 9 [Preface]). It includes an Introduction (1), followed by chapters on Hinduism (2), on Hinduism and Buddhism (3), on "Prophets outside Israel", i.e., Zoroastrianism and Islam (4), and it concludes with Appendix which compares and contrasts the "Quran and Christ". Perhaps the key chapter is "Consummatum Est" (5), which "shows, or tries to show, how the main trend in [mystical] Hinduism and Buddhism on the one hand and of [the prophetic] Zoroastrianism on the other meet and complete each other in the Christian revelation" (Preface, p. 9, words in brackets added).

The book opens with a lucid statement of his own contested hermeneutic:

"with comparative religion," he says, "the question is who's to be master, that's all" (p. 9).[110] He starts by saluting E. O. James. Next Zaehner mentions Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) and al-Ghazali (1058-1111) as both being skeptics about any 'reasonable' writer with no religious experience who expounds on the subject. Here Zaehner acknowledges that many Christians may only be familiar with their own type of religion (similar to Judaism and Islam), and hence be ill-equipped to adequately comprehend Hindu or Buddhist mysticism (pp. 12–15).

Zaehner then compared the Old Testament and the Buddha, the former being a history of God's commandments delivered by his prophets to the Jewish people and their struggle to live accordingly, and the later being a teacher of a path derived from his own experience, which leads to a spiritual enlightenment without God and apart from historical events (pp. 15–19, 24–26). Needed is a way to bridge this gap between these two (pp. 15, 19, 26, 28). The gap is further illustrated as it relates to desire and suffering (p. 21), body and soul (pp. 22–23), personality and death (pp. 23–24). He announced a 'method' special to the book: "I shall concern myself with what sincere men have believed" (p. 29).

Christianity & other Religions

The 1964 book,[111] following its introduction, has four parts: India, China and Japan, Islam, and The Catholic Church. Throughout Zaehner offers connections between the self-understanding of 'other religions' and that of the Judeo-Christian, e.g., the Upanishads and Thomas Merton (pp. 25–26), Taoism and Adam (p. 68), Sunyata and Plato (p. 96), Al-Ghazali and St. Paul (p. 119-120), Samkhya and Martin Buber (pp. 131–132).

In the introduction, Zaehner laments the "very checkered history" of the Church. Yet he expresses his admiration of Pope John (1881-1963), who advanced the dignity that all humanity possesses "in the sight of God". Zaehner then presents a brief history of Christianity in world context. The Church "rejoiced to build into herself whatever in Paganism she found compatible" with the revelation and ministry of Jesus. Her confidence was

inferred in the words of Gamaliel (pp. 7–9).[112] While Europe has known of Jesus for twenty centuries, 'further' Asia has only for three. Jesus, however, seemed to have arrived there with conquerors from across the sea, and "not as the suffering servant" (p. 9).[113] As to the ancient traditions of Asia, Christians did "condemn outright what [they had] not first learnt to understand" (pp. 11, 13). Zaehner thus sets the stage for a modern review of ancient traditions.

"The Catholic Church" chapter starts by celebrating its inclusiveness. Zaehner quotes Cardinal Newman praising the early Church's absorption of classical Mediterranean virtues (a source some term 'heathen').[114] For "from the beginning the Moral Governor of the world has scattered the seeds of truth far and wide... ."[115] There may be some danger for Christians to study the spiritual truths of other religions, but it is found in scripture.[116]

Zaehner counsels that the reader not "neglect the witness" of Hinduism and Buddhism, as they teach inner truths which, among Christians, have withered and faded since the one-sided Reformation. The Church perpetually struggles to keep to a "perfect yet precarious balance between the transcendent... Judge and King and the indwelling Christ". Writing in 1964, Zaehner perceived "a change for the better" in the increasing acceptance of the "Yogin in India or Zen in Japan". Nonetheless, a danger exists for the 'unwary soul' who in exploring other religions may pass beyond the fear of God. Then one may enter the subtleties of mystical experience, and "mistake his own soul for God." Such an error in distinguishing between timeless states can lead to ego inflation, spiritual vanity, and barrenness.[117][118][119]

Zaehner offers this categorical analysis of some major religious affiliations: a) action-oriented, worldly (Judaism, Islam, Protestantism, Confucianism); b) contemplation-oriented, other-worldly (Hinduism, Theravada Buddhism, Taoism); c) in-between (Mahayana Buddhism, neo-Confucianism, the reformed Hinduism of Gandhi, the Catholic Church).[120]

Mystical experience

Mysticism as an academic field of study is relatively recent, emerging from earlier works with a religious and literary accent. From reading the writings of mystics, various traditional distinctions have been further elaborated, such as its psychological nature and its social-cultural context. Discussions have also articulated its phenomenology as a personal experience versus how it has been interpreted by the mystic or by others.[121] Zaehner made his contributions, e.g., to its comparative analysis and its typology.

Sacred and Profane

After Zaehner's initial works on Zoroastrianism, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957) was his first published on another subject. It followed his assumption of the Spalding chair at All Souls College, Oxford. The book's conversational style delivers clarity and wisdom on a difficult subject, and along the way are found many illuminating digressions and asides.

The profane side is first addressed with regard to the use of mescaline. Zaehner himself carefully took this natural psychedelic drug. He discussed in particular Aldous Huxley, especially in his popular 1954 book *The Doors of Perception* (pp. 1–29, 208–226). Next, the subject of nature mystics is described and appraised, including two examples from literature: Proust and Rimbaud (pp. 30–83). 'Madness', it is also pointed out, may sometimes result in mental states that accord with those of the mystics (p. 84-105).

A chapter "Integration and isolation" takes a comparative view, discussing mystics of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, as well as Jung's psychology. Integration is described as nature mysticism joined to the intellect, whereby reason and the unconscious nourish one another (p. 114). Isolation refers to Samkhya mysticism, whereby the purusa (the soul) and prakrti (nature) are separated (p. 106-128). About the Hindu mystics, Zaehner contrasts Samkhya, a dualist doctrine associated with the Yoga method, and non-dualist Vedanta, a monism inspired by the Upanishads. The relative merits of Monism verses Theism, and vice versa, are discussed (pp. 153–197). Near

the end of his conclusion, Zaehner repeats his view that the monist and the theistic are "distinct and mutually opposed types of mysticism" (p. 204).

Hindu and Muslim

His innovative 1960 book compares the mystical literature and practice of Hindus and Muslims. He frames it with a theme of diversity.[122] On experiential foundations, Zaehner then commences to explore the spiritual treasures left to us by the mystics of the Santana Dharma, and of the Sufi tariqas. Often he offers a phenomenological description of the reported experiences, after which he interprets them in various theological terms. [123]

Following Surendranath N. Dasgupta, Zaehner describes five different types of mysticism to be found in Indian tradition: "the sacrificial, the Upanishadic, the Yogic, the Buddhistic, and that of bhakti." [124] Zaehner leaves aside the 'sacrificial' (as being primarily of historic interest), and the 'Buddhist' (due to contested definitions of nirvana), [125] so that as exemplars of mystical experience he presents:

(a) the Upanishadic "I am this All" which can be subdivided into (i) a theistic interpretation or (ii) a monistic;

(b) the Yogic "unity" outside space and time, either (i) of the eternal monad of the mystic's own individual soul per the Yoga Sutas of Patanjali or (ii) of Brahman, the ground of the universe, per the advaita Vedanta of Sankara; and,

(c) the Bhakti mysticism of love, according to the commentary on the Bhagavad Gita by Ramanuja. [126]

Based on the above schematic, the resulting study of the mystics of the two religions is somewhat asymmetrical. Zaehner chose to treat initially Hindu mystics, because of their relative freedom from creed or dogma. The mystics and sufis of Islam selected are from all over the Islamic world, e.g., Junayd of Baghdad, and Al-Ghazali. [127] Included are mystics from the Mughal era.

Both Hindu and Muslim are given careful scrutiny, Zaehner discussing their insight into mystical experience.

Comparative mysticism

In his work on comparative religion, Zaehner directly addressed mysticism, particularly in Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. He criticized the then widely-held view that in mystical experience was to be found the key to the unity of all religions. He based his contrary views on well-known texts authored by the mystics of various traditions. Zaehner, after describing their first-hand reports of experiences of extraordinary states of consciousness, presented also their traditional interpretations. The result seems to indicate a great variety of mystical experience, and clear differences in how these were understood theologically. Many experiences seems to evidence a particular world view, e.g., theisms, monisms, dualisms, pantheisms, or agnostic.[128][129]

His critique challenged the thesis of Richard Bucke, developed in his 1901 book, Cosmic Consciousness. Bucke describes certain lesser facilities, followed by accounts of the prized 'cosmic' state of mind. Fourteen exemplary people of history as presented, shown as each reaching a somewhat similar realization: the plane of cosmic consciousness.[130][131]

This idea, called the Perennial philosophy, has been variously advanced, e.g., by Aldous Huxley, by Frithjof Schuon, by Houston Smith. Zaehner does not dispute that these spiritual visionaries reach a distinguishable level of awareness. Nor does he deny that by following a disciplined life sequence over time one may be led to mystical experience: withdrawal, purgation, illumination. Instead, what Zaehner suggests is a profound difference between, e.g., the pantheistic vision of a nature mystic, admittedly pleasant and wholesome, and the personal union of a theist with the Divine lover of humankind.[132][133][134][135][136]

Gender: Soul & Spirit

Zaehner's study of mystical writings also incorporated its psychological dimensions, yet as a supplement, not as definitive.[137][138] About the experience of unusual states of consciousness, many mystics have written using as a descriptive metaphor language associated with marriage symbolism or sexuality.[139][140][141][142]

Abrahamic religions traditionally identify the gender of the supreme Being as male. In Islam and in Christianity, the soul of the often male sufi or mystic, following his spiritual discipline, may encounter the holy presence of the male Deity.[143][144] The Christian Church as a whole, as a community of souls, for millennia has been self-described as the Bride of Christ.[145][146][147][148]

Across centuries and continents, mystics have used erotic metaphors and sexual analogies in descriptions of Divine love. The special states of consciousness they recorded have become the subject of modern psychological studies, e.g., by the school of C. G. Jung (often favored by Zaehner).[149][150][151] Among Christian mystics Teresa de Jesús (1515-1582) employed the spiritual marriage metaphor in writing about her experiences.[152][153] Mechthild von Magdeburg (c.1208-1282/1294)[154][155][156][157][158] provides a special example of the woman mystic.[159][160]

Along with other authors, Zaehner writes of the mystics' marriage symbolism and erotic imagery. He quotes an exemplary passage of François de Sales (1567-1622),[161] then continues:

"Both in mystical rapture and in sexual union reason and intelligence are momentarily set at naught. The soul 'flows' and 'hurls itself out of itself'. ...all consciousness of the ego has disappeared. As the Buddhist would say, there is no longer any 'I' or 'mine', the ego has been swallowed up into a greater whole." [162][163][164][165]

Yet, when approaching this delicate subject, especially at the chaotic threshold to a New Age, the rapid changes afoot may confound sex talk and conflate opposites, which elicits diverse commentary.[166][167][168][169] Regarding the transcultural experience of mystical states, however, the traditional analogy of marriage symbolism continues to endure, drawing interest and advocates. Augmenting the above examples is the Dutch mystic Jan van Ruusbroec (1239-1381).[170][171][172][173][174]

Zaehner evolved into a committed Christian, whose ethics and morals were founded on his Catholic faith. Accordingly, sexuality is blessed within the context of marriage.[175] His sexual orientation before and during World War II was said to have been homosexual. During his later life, while a don at Oxford, he became wholly devoted to teaching, research and writing; he abstained from sexual activity.[176][177][178]

Typology of mysticism

In 1958, Zaehner presented a general analysis of the range of mystical experience in the form of a typology. Dasgupta was a source, which Zaehner modified, truncated and refashioned.[179][180] The resulting schema of the typology aimed to reflect both the mystic's report of the experience itself and the mystic's personal 'explanation' of it. Commentaries by others found in traditional spiritual literature (spanning centuries) were also referenced. The 'explanations' usually drew the mystic's religious heritage. Of the various typologies suggested by Zaehner,[181][182][183][184][185][186] the following has been selected here.[187]

(1) Nature mystics, e.g., secular 'oceanic';

(2) Isolation, interpreted as either:[188]

Dualist, e.g., Samkhya-Yogin, or

Monistic, e.g., non-dualist Vedanta;

(3) Theistic, e.g., Abrahamic religions.

An endemic problem with such an analytic typology is the elusive nature of the conscious experience during the mystical state, its shifting linguistic descriptions and perspectives of subject/object, and the psychology of spiritual awareness itself. In addition, each type category is hardly pure, in that there is a great variety of overlap between them.[189] Furthermore, each religion appears to field contending schools of mystical thought, and often interpretations of subtle conscious states may differ within each of the schools.[190] When a list of the several proposed typologies suggested by Zaehner over the years are mustered and compared, Fernandes found the results "unstable".[191] Accordingly, an observer might conclude that the spiritual map of possible mysticisms would present a confused jumble through which snake perplexing pathways, difficult of analysis. Zaehner's proposals suffer from such endemic difficulties.[192][193]

Nota bene: Kripal remarks that Zaehner is known for a "tripartite typology of mystical states".[194] However here four types are discussed. Zaehner's "Isolation" composite is divided in its two components: the Dualist, and the Monistic. These two types may be deemed functionally equivalent, yet as self-defined the Monistic experience (of Vedanta) is not an isolated event but instead is connected to the cosmic unity.[195]

Nature mysticism

Nature mysticism is a term used to catalogue generally those spontaneous experiences of an oceanic feeling in which a person identifies with nature, or is similarly thrown back in awe of the unforgettable, vast sweep of the cosmos. Such may be described philosophically as a form of pantheism, or often as pan-en-hen-ic.[196] Nature mysticism may also include such a state of consciousness induced by drugs. Like Aldous Huxley[197] he had taken mescaline, but Zaehner came to a different conclusion. In his 1957 book *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane. An Inquiry into some Varieties of Praeternatural Experience*, there is a narrative description of the author's experience under the influence of mescaline.[198]

In part, about nature mysticism, Zaehner relies on William James,[199][200]

[201] Carl Jung,[202][203][204] a personal experience recorded by Martin Buber,[205][206][207] the descriptions of Marcel Proust and of Arthur Rimbaud, among others.[208][209][210] and writings of Richard Jeffries and of Richard Maurice Bucke,[211][212] The Hindu Upanishads were viewed by Zaehner as "a genuine bridge" between nature mysticism and theistic mysticism.[213][214]

A primary aim of Zaehner appeared to be making the distinction between a morally open experience found in nature mysticism as contrasted with the beatific vision of the theist.[215][216] Zaehner set himself against Aldous Huxley's style of the Perennial Philosophy which held as uniform all mystical experience. Accordingly, he understood Huxley's interpretation of 'nature mysticism' as naïve, self-referent, and inflated, an idea seeded with future misunderstandings.[217][218][219] Yet, considering Huxley's conversion to Vedanta and to his immersion in Zen, Zaehner arrived at an appraisal of Huxley that was nuanced, and selectively in accord.[220]

Dualism, e.g., Samkhya

Samkhya philosophy is an ancient dualist doctrine of India.[221] In appraising the experienced world, Samkhya understood it as composed largely of prakrti (nature, mostly unconscious exterior matter, but also inner elements of human life not immortal), and purusa (the human soul aware). Its dualism generally contrasts the 'objectively' seen (prakriti) and the subjective seer (purusa). Long ago Yoga adherents adopted doctrines of Samkhya.[222][223][224][225] As a person pursues his spiritual quest under Samkhya-yoga, his immortal soul (purusa) emerges, becomes more and more defined and distinct, as it separates from entangling nature (prakriti). Prakriti includes even the nature affecting personal qualities, such as the three gunas (modes), the buddhi (universal intellect), the mind (manas), the body, the ahamkara (the ego): all of which the purusa sheds. Of the resulting refined and purified purusa there is yielded the eternity of the yogin's true Self in isolation.[226][227][228]

An advanced mystic may attain a recurrent state of tranquil, steady

illumination in meditative isolation. The Samkhya understands this as the benign emergence within the practicing yogin of his own purified, immortal purusa. A plurality of purusas exist, as many as there are people. A mystic's own purusa generally is about identical to the many other isolated purusas, each separately experienced from within, by millions of other humans.[229] [230] Under the Samkhya, Hindus may refer to this personal, isolated experience of immortality as the purified self, the purusa, or otherwise called the personal atman (Sanskrit: self). Au contraire, a Hindu mystic following a rival school of Vedanta may understand the same tranquil, steady illumination differently (i.e., as not Samkhya's purusa). As Zaehner proposed: the same or similar mystical experience may result in very different theological interpretations.[231][232][233]

Instead of the isolated purusa experience of Samkhya, the Advaita Vedanta mystic might interpret it as the experience of the Self, which illuminates the mystic's direct connection to the all-inclusive entity of cosmic totality. Such a numinous, universal Self is called Brahman (Sanskrit: sacred power),[234] or Paramatma.[235][236] Here, the Samkhya understands an isolated, purified, eternal purusa (self); the contrary Vedanta mystic would experience an illuminating connection to the cosmic Brahman.[237][238]

Hence, the mystical experience (briefly outlined here) is differently interpreted. The subject: (1) may achieve, by separation from prakriti (nature), the goal of immortality of her purusa, purified in isolation within herself; or (2) may become absorbed by discovery of her direct identity with the divine, immortal, luminous Brahman.[239][240] Accordingly, in Zaehner's terms, such experience may be either (1) a dualistic Samkhya atheism, or (2) a monistic type of Advaita Vedanta. Neither for Zaehner can be called theistic, i.e., in neither case is there an interactive, sacred experience with a numinous personality.[241][242]

Monism, e.g., Vedanta

In non-dualist Vedanta,[243][244][245] the Hindu mystic would understand reality as nothing but the Divine Unity, inclusive of the mystic subject

herself. A special, awesome, impersonal Presence may be experienced as universal totality. The persistent Hindu, after years of prescriptive discipline to purge her soul, may discover an inner stream of Being, the Brahman, in which she herself is encompassed like wet in the sea. Such a transformative consciousness of spiritual energy emits eternities of bliss. [246]

What is called 'nature' (prakriti in Samkhya), philosophically, does not exist, according to the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara (c. 7th century). [247][248] The objective 'other' is ultimately an illusion or maya. [249][250] A realized person's antaratma or inner self is directly identical with the paramatma, the Supreme Soul or Brahman. As the Upanishads states to the seeker, "thou art that", Tat Tvam Asi, i.e., the personal atma is the divine Atma. What Samkhya darsana mistakes for an isolated purusa (self) is really the Brahman: the whole of the universe; all else is illusion. [251][252] Brahma is being, consciousness, bliss. [253][254]

Zaehner's typology often focused for comparative articulation on some Hindu forms of mysticism, i.e., the Astika of the dualist Samkhya and of the non-dualist Vedanta, and Sankara versus Ramanuja distinctions. Not addressed independently in this context were other forms of mysticism, e.g., the Theravada, the Mahayana, Chan Buddhism. [255][256][257][258]

The non-dualist finds a complete unity within a subjective sovereignty: ultimately absorption in a numinous presence, the absolute. Constituted is a meditative perception of an all-encompassing "we" absent any hint of "they". Au contraire the Samkhya dualist understands that in his transcendent meditation he will begin to perceive his own emergent Self as an isolated purusa, in process of being purified from enmeshment in a nonetheless existing 'objective' prakriti. Despite the profound difference, Zaehner understands each as in some sense acquired in isolation. The two direct mystical experiences as found in Hindu literature Zaehner endeavors to present competently, as well as to introduce the framing theological filters used for explanation. [259]

Theism, e.g., Christian

Theistic mysticism is common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Hinduism also includes its own traditions of theistic worship with a mystical dimension. Ramanuja (11th-12th century) articulated this theological schema, Vishishtadvaita, which departs from the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara (see above section).

According to Zaehner, Christianity and theistic religions offer the possibility of a sacred mystical union with an attentive creator God, whereas a strictly monistic approach instead leads to the self-unity experience of natural religion.[260][261] Yet Zaehner remained hopeful in the long run of an ever-increasing understanding between religions. "We have much to learn from Eastern religions, and we have much too to give them; but we are always in danger of forgetting the art of giving--of giving without strings... ." [262][263]

Mystical union between the mystic and the Deity in a sense confounds the distinction between dualistic and monistic mysticism. For if the two are identical already, there is no potential for the act of union. Yet the act of divine union also negates a continuous dualism.[264][265]

During the 1940s spent in Iran he returned to the Christian faith. Decades later he published The Catholic Church and World Religions (1964), expressly from that perspective. As an objective scholar, he drew on his acquired insights from this source to further his understanding of others. Zaehner "did not choose to write to convince others of the truth of his own faith," rather "to frame questions" was his usual purpose.[266]

Hindu studies

His translations and the Hinduism book "made Zaehner one of the most important modern exponents of Hindu theological and philosophical

doctrines... . The works on mysticism are more controversial though they established important distinctions in refusing to regard all mysticisms as the same," wrote Prof. Geoffrey Parrinder.[267] For Zaehner's Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (1960), and like analyses, see "Comparative Mysticism" section.

Hinduism

While an undergraduate at Christ Church in Oxford, Zaehner studied several Persian languages. He also taught himself a related language, Sanskrit, used to write the early Hindu sacred books. Decades later he was asked by OUP to author a volume on Hinduism. Unexpectedly Zaehner insisted on first reading in Sanscrit the Mahabharata, a very long epic.[268] More than an heroic age story of an ancient war, the Mahabharata gives us the foremost compendium on Hindu religion and way of life.[269]

The resulting treatise Hinduism (1962) is elegant, deep, and short. Zaehner discusses, among other things, the subtleties of dharma, and Yudhishtira, the son of Dharma, who became the King of righteousness (dharma raja). Yudhishtira is the elder of five brothers of the royal Pandava family, who leads one side in the war of the Mahabharata. Accordingly, he struggles to follow his conscience, to do the right thing, to avoid slaughter and bloodshed. Yet he finds that tradition and custom, and the Lord Krishna, are ready to allow the usual killing and mayhem of warfare.[270][271]

As explained in Hinduism, all his life Yudhishtira struggles to follow his conscience.[272] Yet when Yudhishtira participates in the battle of Kuruksetra, he is told by Krishna to state a "half truth" meant to deceive. Zaehner discusses: Yudhishtira and moksha (liberation), and karma; and Yudhishtira's troubles with warrior caste dharma.[273][274][275] In the last chapter, Yudhishtira 'returns' as Mahatma Gandhi.[276] Other chapters discuss the early literature of the Vedas, the deities, Bhakti devotional practices begun in medieval India, and the encounter with, and response to, modern Europeans.[277]

Yudhishtira

Zaehner continued his discussion of Yudhishtira in a chapter from his Gifford Lectures.[278][279] Analogies appear to connect the Mahabharata's Yudhishtira and the biblical Job. Yet their situations differed.

Yudhishtira, although ascetic by nature, was a royal leader who had to directly face the conflicts of his society. His realm and his family suffered great misfortunes due to political conflict and war. Yet the divine Krishna evidently considered the war and the destructive duties of the warrior (the kshatriya dharma) acceptable. The wealthy householder Job, a faithful servant of his Deity, suffers severe family and personal reversals, due to Divine acquiescence. Each human being, both Job and Yudhishtira, is committed to following his righteous duty, acting in conformity to his conscience.[280][281]

When the family advisor Vidura reluctantly challenges him to play dice at Dhrtarastra's palace, "Yudhishtira believes it is against his moral code to decline a challenge." [282][283] Despite, or because of, his devotion to the law of dharma, Yudhishtira then "allowed himself be tricked into a game of dice." In contesting against very cunning and clever players, he gambles "his kingdom and family away." His wife becomes threatened with slavery.[284][285][286]

Even so, initially Yudhishtira with "holy indifference" tries to "defend traditional dharma" and like Job to "justify the ways of God in the eyes of men." Yet his disgraced wife Draupadi dramatically attacks Krishna for "playing with his creatures as children play with dolls." Although his wife escapes slavery, the bitter loss in the dice game is only a step in the sequence of seemingly divinely-directed events that led to a disastrous war, involving enormous slaughter. Although Yudhishtira is the King of Dharma, eventually he harshly criticizes the bloody duties of a warrior (the caste dharma of the kshatriya), duties imposed also on kings. Yudhishtira himself prefers the "constant virtues" mandated by the dharma of a brahmin. "Krishna represents the old order," interprets Zaehner, where "trickery and violence" hold "an honorable place".[287][288]

Translations

In his Hindu Scriptures (1966) Zaehner translates ancient sacred texts, his selections of the Rig-Veda, the Atharva-Veda, the Upanishads, and the entire, 80-page Bhagavad Gita. He discusses these writings in his short Introduction. A brief Glossary of Names is at the end.[289] "Zaehner's extraordinary command of the texts" was widely admired by his academic peers.[290]

That year Zaehner also published an extensively annotated Bhagavad Gita. [291] which is a prized and celebrated episode of the Mahabharata epic. Before the great battle, the Lord Krishna discusses with the Pandava brother Arjuna the enduring spiritual realities and the duties of his caste dharma. Krishna "was not merely a local prince of no very great importance: he was God incarnate--the great God Vishnu who has taken on human flesh and blood." After his translation, Zaehner provides a long Commentary, which is informed by: the medieval sages Sankara and Ramanuja, ancient scriptures and epics, and modern scholarship. His Introduction places the Gita within the context of the Mahabharata epic and of Hindu religious teachings and philosophy. Issues of the Gita are addressed in terms of the individual Self, material Nature, Liberation, and Deity. The useful Appendix is organized by main subject, and under each entry the relevant passages are "quoted in full", giving chapter and verse.[292][293]

Sri Aurobindo

In his 1971 book Evolution in Religion, Zaehner discusses Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872–1950), a modern Hindu spiritual teacher, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955), a French palaeontologist and Jesuit visionary.[294][295] Zaehner discusses each, and appraises their religious innovations.[296]

Aurobindo at age seven was sent to England for education, eventually studying western classics at Cambridge University. On his return to Bengal in India, he studied its ancient literature in Sanskrit. He later became a major political orator with a spiritual dimension, a prominent leader for

Indian independence. Hence he was jailed. There in 1908 he had a religious experience. Relocating to the then French port of Pondicherry, he became a yogin and was eventually recognized as a Hindu sage. Sri Aurobindo's writings reinterpret the Hindu traditions.[297] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, later President of India, praised him.[298] "As a poet, philosopher, and mystic, Sri Aurobindo occupies a place of the highest eminence in the history of modern India." [299][300][301]

Aurobindo, Zaehner wrote, "could not accept the Vedanta in its classic non-dualist formulation, for he had come to accept Darwinism and Bergson's idea of creative evolution." If the One being was "totally static" as previously understood "then there could be no room for evolution, creativity, or development of any kind." Instead, as reported by Zaehner, Aurobindo considered that "the One though absolutely self sufficient unto itself, must also be the source... of progressive, evolutionary change." He found "the justification for his dynamic interpretation of the Vedanta in the Hindu Scriptures themselves, particularly in the Bhagavad-Gita." [302][303] According to Aurobindo, the aim of his new yoga was:

"[A] change in consciousness radical and complete" of no less a jump in "spiritual evolution" than "what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world." Regarding his new Integral Yoga: "The thing to be gained is the bringing in of a Power of Consciousness... not yet organized or active directly in earth-nature, ...but yet to be organized and made directly active." [304][305]

Aurobindo foresaw that a Power of Consciousness will eventually work a collective transformation in each human being, inviting us as a specie then to actually be able to form and sustain societies of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. [306] "It must be remembered that there is Aurobindo the socialist and Aurobindo the mystic." [307][308]

Adherents of Aurobindo's new Integral Yoga (Purna Yoga) [309] seek to lead

India to a spiritual awakening, by facilitating an increasingly common soul-experience, in which each person achieves a mystic union with the One. Such a gnosis would be guided by the Power of Consciousness. In choosing to pursue the spiritual realization of social self-understanding, India would hasten the natural evolution of humanity.[310][311] Hence furthering the conscious commitment everywhere, to collaborate with the hidden drive of creative evolution toward a spiritual advance, is high among the missions of Aurobindo's new 'Integral Yoga'.[312][313][314][315][316]

Gifford lecture at St Andrews

Zaehner gave the Gifford Lectures in Scotland during the years 1967–1969. In these sessions he revisits comparative mysticism and Bucke, focuses on Hinduism and Buddhism, Yudhishtira and later Job, discusses Taoist classics, Neo-Confucianism, and Zen. He doesn't forget Jung or Zoroaster, Marx or Teilhard. The result is a 464-page book: *Concordant Discord. The Interdependence of Faiths*.

In the course of the discourse, he mentions occasionally a sophisticated view: how the different religions have provided a mutuality of nourishment, having almost unconsciously interpenetrated each other's beliefs. The historically obfuscated result is that neighbouring religions might develop the other's theological insights as their own, as well as employ the other's distinctions to accent, or explain, their own doctrines to themselves. Although Zaehner gives a suggestive commentary at the conjunction of living faiths, he respects that each remains distinct, unique. Zaehner allows the possibility of what he calls the convergence of faiths, or solidarity.[317] [318]

Regarding the world religions Zaehner held, however, that we cannot use the occasional occurrence of an ironic syncretism among elites as a platform from which to leap to a unity within current religions. His rear-guard opinions conflicted with major academic trends then prevailing. "In these ecumenical days it is unfashionable to emphasize the difference between religions." Yet Zaehner remained skeptical, at the risk of alienating those in

the ecumenical movement whose longing for a festival of conciliation caused them to overlook the stubborn divergence inherent in the momentum. "We must force nothing: we must not try to achieve a 'harmony' of religions at all costs when all we can yet see is a 'concordant discord'... At this early stage of contact with the non-Christian religions, this surely is the most that we can hope for." [319]

Social ideology and ethics

A militant state cult

Zaehner used a comparative-religion approach in his several discussions of Communism, both as philosophical-religious theory (discussed below), [320] and here in its practical business running a sovereign state. In its ideological management of political and economic operations, Soviet party rule was sometimes said to demonstrate an attenuated resemblance to Catholic Church governance. Features in common included an authoritarian command structure (similar to the military), guided by a revered theory (or dogma), which was articulated in abstract principles and exemplars that could not be questioned. [321][322][323]

For the Marxist-Leninist adherent, the 'laws of nature', i.e., dialectical materialism, was the orthodox, mandatory scientism. It dominated the political economy of society through its application, historical materialism. [324] Accordingly, a complex dialectic involving class conflict provided a master key to these "natural" laws, however difficult to decipher. [325][326] [327][328]

"Stalin saw, quite rightly, that since the laws of Nature manifested themselves in the tactical vicissitudes of day-to-day politics with no sort of clarity, even the most orthodox Marxists were bound to go astray. It was, therefore, necessary that some one man whose authority was absolute, should be found to pronounce ex cathedra what the correct reading of historical necessity was. Such a man he found in himself." [329][330][331] [332]

A Soviet hierarchical system thus developed during the Stalinist era, which appeared to be a perverse copy of the organization of the Roman Catholic Church.[333][334] Zaehner did not overlook the deadly, hideous atrocities, whether episodic in the millions or merely continuously sadistic, perpetrated during Stalin's rule, chiefly on his own overworked citizenry. [335][336][337][338][339] Zaehner, however, did not further pursue the Leninist party's monopoly of state power. Instead, what perplexed him were other aspects of Marx and Engels: the artful pitch able to inspire popular motivation, its putative visionary import and quasi-religious dimensions that could attract the interest of free peoples.[340][341][342]

Dialectical materialism

Marxist ideology has been compared to religious theology, perhaps its original source.[343][344][345][346] Zaehner explored its explicitly materialist perspective, an ancient philosophical view further developed post-Hegel, then adopted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. As a result, Hegel's idealist system of dialectics was turned 'downside up'. [347][348] Zaehner's experience in espionage and comparative religion informed his search for the positive in the proffered dialectic of matter. An unlikely analogy was to the worldly benefits caused by the Spirit of Christianity, through its centuries-long role in guiding the social-development of church communities. Here Zaehner was inspired by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: his writings on spirit and matter.[349][350][351]

Zaehner writes that Friedrich Engels in his later life combined "Marxian materialism, Darwinian evolution, and eastern mysticism" in a philosophy that resembled religious teaching. This theme, however, was not taken up or developed in a Marxist-Leninist context. Writing in a philosophical mode, Engels utilized "a religion without a personal God and even without a Hegelian Absolute" in pursuit of fostering his nascent communist ideology. [352][353]

Yet Herbert Marcuse condemned such static philosophizing, i.e., when party ideologists had employed the dialectic as if an academic tool to analyze industrialization in the mid-Soviet period. Marcuse rejected such abstract schema as inert, lifeless, not up to the stormy task of running an authentic socialist state. Instead, Marcuse averred, true materialist dialectics are fluid, flexible, and trade insights with the push and pull of human affairs. The true dialectic stays closely connected to the possibly-fierce dynamic of working-class struggle.[354][355][356][357]

Au contraire, Arthur Koestler was dismayed to find that dialectical reason could not chart the party line. Yet the party simply rejected such thinking as "mechanistic". Are the dialectic and party line unpredictable, Koestler asked, irrational in their own terms? All was subtle and complex, the party counseled, reserved for party leaders trained in the malleable ideology. They alone could discern the interplay and feed-back of it all in actual operation. Koestler became cynical. Often the party appeared to manipulate its dialectical explanations to cover unjustified, abrupt changes in the party line. Such practices permitted an arbitrary rule by the party's leadership. [358][359]

About the materialist dialectic itself, its signature political application by communist parties is to a conjectured 'history' of class warfare.[360] In theory, the replacement of the bourgeoisie (the dialectical thesis) in violent struggle by the proletariat (the antithesis),[361] in results in the fabled 'classless society' (synthesis),[362][363] an "allegedly scientific utopia".[364] Among its proponents such dialectic has drawn widely different interpretations.[365][366] Zaehner, however, sought to find and to honor the beneficial and illuminating points in the grand materialist, humanistic vision of Karl Marx,[367] from among its otherwise disastrous teaching of calculated animosity, soulless violence, murderous class war, followed by an apocalyptic dictatorship.[368][369][370]

Cultural evolution

The interaction of evolutionary science and of social studies with traditional

religions thought, particularly Christian, drew Zaehner's attention. Serving him as a catalyst were the writings on evolution by Teilhard de Chardin,[371][372] and on mescaline by Aldous Huxley.[373][374] Engendered is the mystical body of Christ as an active symbol of transformation, Christianity as a soul collective, which carries "the promise of sanctification to the material world re-created by man." [375][376][377][378][379]

The physical potential in inorganic matter, according to Teilhard, 'spontaneously' develops into life organisms that reproduce, then such living matter eventually evolves consciousness, until eons hence a Christological collective Omega Point will be reached.[380] The issue of such a future humanity-wide salvation on earth, in juxtaposition to the orthodox salvation of each individual confirmed at death, is apprehended and discussed.[381][382][383] While energized and often favorable, Zaehner could turn a more critical eye toward Teilhard,[384] while acknowledging his advocacy for the poor.[385][386][387]

Juxtaposing (1) a spiritual understanding of graphic biblical stories, often from Genesis, that illuminate the human choices and conflicts, with (2) a conjectured historical narrative of early human society, Zaehner would then employ psychology[388] and literature to craft an anthropology of modern social norms, within a spiritual commentary.[389]

In a few different books Zaehner retold in several versions the 'simple' story of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve start in an unconscious state, analogous to prehistoric human beings. They remain unaware of good or evil, unconscious of sin. Tasting the forbidden fruit, however, of the tree of knowledge, offered by the serpent, opens their eyes. This their original sin results in their awakening. They are naked in the garden, they must leave it. Once unconsciously they enjoyed the free bounty of nature, but now they must work for a living and create a fallen human society to live in.[390][391][392][393][394][395] Zaehner writes:

The discovery of evolution hit the Christian churches hard... . [T]he Genesis story has to be interpreted against the background of our evolutionary origin. Once we do this, then the Fall begins to look more like an ascent than a degradation. For self-consciousness which transforms man into a rational animal is a qualitative leap in the evolutionary process... life becomes conscious of itself.[396][397][398]

In the multiple discussions referenced above, Zaehner is referring to the long-term cultural evolution of human societies, which happens in the wake of the billion-year biological evolution by natural selection. Of the later our bodies are heirs. Of the former our consciousness takes the lead. Sri Aurobindo, the subject of another book by Zaehner, advocated a disciplined commitment of the spirit, informed by yoga, to advancing the cultural evolution of the species.[399][400][401]

'New Age' drug culture

In his last three books, *Drugs, Mysticism and Makebelieve* (1972), *Our Savage God* (1974), and *City within the Heart* (1981) [posthumous], Zaehner turned to address issues in contemporary society, drawing on his studies of comparative religion. He further explored the similarities and the differences between drug-induced experiences and traditional mysticism. As an academic he had already published several books on such issues starting in 1957.[402][403][404] In the meantime, a widespread counterculture had arisen, often called New Age, which included artists, rebels, and youth. Their psychedelic experiences were often self-explained spiritually, with reference to zen and eastern mysticism.[405][406] Consequently, Zaehner wanted to reach this "wider public".[407] During the late 1960s he was "very often invited to talk on the BBC." [408]

Zaehner described various ancient quests to attain a mystical state of transcendence, of unification. Therein all contradictions and oppositions are reconciled; subject and object disappear, one passes beyond good and evil. That said, such a monist view can logically lead to excess, even to criminal acts.[409] If practiced under the guidance of traditional religious teachers,

no harm usually results.[410][411][412] The potential for evil exists, however, through subtle misunderstanding or careless enthusiasm, according to Zaehner. After arriving at such a transcendent point, a troubled drug user may go wrong by feeling licensed to do anything, with no moral limit. The misuse of a mystical state and its theology eventually can lead to an horrific end.[413][414]

Zaehner warned of the misbehavior propagated by LSD advocate Timothy Leary,[415][416] the earlier satanism of Aleister Crowley,[417] and ultimately the criminal depravity of Charles Manson.[418][419][420] His essay "Rot in the Clockwork Orange" further illustrates from popular culture the possible brutal effects of such moral confusion and license.[421]

Yet Zaehner's detailed examination and review was not a witch hunt. His concluding appraisal of the LSD experience, although not without warning of its great risks and dangers, contained a limited, circumscribed allowance for use with a spiritual guide.[422][423][424]

Drugs, Mysticism

As its title indicates, the book addresses a range of contemporary issues. [425] It was expanded from three talks he gave on BBC radio in 1970, which were printed in *The Listener* [9]. Although admittedly it repeats some material from his prior books, it is "aimed at a wider audience" (p. 9).

In his appraisal of LSD the psychedelic drug and its relevance to mysticism, Zaehner discussed the drug's popular advocate Timothy Leary and his 1970 book.[426] Zaehner comments that, to the inexperienced, "most descriptions of Zen enlightenment, and some of LSD experience would appear to be almost identical." What Leary calls the "timeless energy process around you" (pp. 113–114 quote; 70 & 112 quote). Yet Zaehner refers to Krishnamurti of India, and zen abbot Zenkei Shibayama of Japan. Apparently each describes a crucial difference between meditation and such experiences as LSD (pp. 114–116).

The celebration of sex while under its influence by Leary and also by many in the drug culture Zaehner compared to the frequent use of sexual imagery by the mystics of different religious cultures [63, 66-70]. Even though passages in Leary's book comport with the Hindu Upanishads, Zaehner writes that by Leary's near deification of sexuality he "would appear to part company" with most nature mystics and, e.g., with St. Francis de Sales, who distinguishes mystical ecstasy and sexual ecstasy (pp. 68–69, 70 quote). In later discussing Georges Bernanos,[427] Zaehner opines that "sex without love" would constitute an abandonment of the virtues (pp. 174–175).

Zaehner discusses Carl Jung and his 1952 book *Answer to Job* (pp. 163–170).

Our Savage God

The book's title is somewhat misleading.[428] It attaches well, however, to its first chapter, "Rot in the Clockwork Orange", about the putative rationale of then contemporary episodes of mayhem and murder. About the hippie psychotic fringe, it made world headlines. Zaehner's focus is not on usual criminality but on hideous acts claiming a religious sanction, that with sinister cunning fakes the 'new age' (p. 12). The chapter's title refers to the 1962 novel by Anthony Burgess and the 1971 film by Stanley Kubrick (p. 35). Portrayed therein is crazy, soul-killing violence.[429][430]

Yet, very differently, about his book on the whole Zaehner says its hero is Aristotle. The supporting cast is drawn from his "philosophical milieu" (p. 14). The next four chapters cover: Heraclitus per a dialectical unity of opposites (pp. 92, 102);[431] Parmenides whose Way of Truth is compared to the Vedanta's Brahman (121-122); Plato (141-160); and the stagirite hero who arrives at Being, akin to Sat-Cit-Ananda (p. 192). As indicated, Zaehner offers a comparison of these Ancient Greek philosophers to the Vedic wisdom of ancient India, especially the mythopoetic element in the Upanishads (e.g., p. 133-138).

Yet this philosophical theme is somewhat misleading as well, for Zaehner intermittently interjects the ever-present and unwelcome possibility of criminality and mayhem. Charles Manson on occasion appears as the personification of the evil side of contemporary drug culture. His depraved mystical con-game provides some unappetizing food for thought.[432]

Quotations

There is indeed a sharp division between those religions whose characteristic form of religious experience is prayer and adoration of Pascal's God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob on the one hand, and religions in which sitting postures designed to find the God within you are thought to be the most appropriate way of approaching the Deity.[433][434]

Jung has done in the twentieth century A.D. what the Hindus did in perhaps the eighth century B.C.; he has discovered empirically the existence of an immortal soul in man, dwelling outside time and space, which can actually be experienced. This soul Jung, like the Hindus, calls the "self"... [which is] extremely difficult to describe in words. Hence his "self" is as hard to grasp as the Indian atman.[435][436]

One quite arresting resemblance between Zoroastrianism and Christianity remains to be noticed. This is the Haoma sacrifice and sacrament which seems to foreshadow the Catholic Mass in so strange a way. ... [T]he Haoma rite with partially fermented juice became the central act of Zoroastrian worship... .[437][438][439]

The whole ascetic tradition, whether it be Buddhist, Platonist, Manichaeon, Christian or Islamic, springs from that most polluted of all sources, the Satanic sin of pride, the desire to be 'like gods'. We are not gods, we are social, irrational animals, designed to become rational, social animals, and finally, having built our house on solid Aristotelian rock, to become 'like a god', our work well done.[440][441][442]

Few Catholics are now proud of the Sack of Constantinople, the Albigensian Crusade, the Inquisition, or the Wars of Religion, nor... the Crusades. It has taken us a long time to realize that we cannot... remove the mote from our brother's eye without first getting rid of the beam in our own.[443][444][445]

True, the human phylum did not split up into separate subspecies as has been the case with other animal species, but it did split up into different religions and cultures, each having its own particular flavour, and each separated from the rest. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit... the scattering of man which is symbolised by the Tower of Babel comes to an end: the Church of Christ is born and the symbol of unity and union is found.
[446][447][448]

Aristotle claimed to have known God 'for a short time' only, but that was enough. He was never so immodest as to claim that he had known the Truth, for he knew that this is reserved for God alone.[449][450]

See also

Comparative religion

History of religions

Religious studies

Zoroastrianism

Interfaith dialogue

Notes

His appearance above likely suffers from heart disease, to which he succumbed in 1974.

Photographs of R. C. Zaehner are rare. One was published to accompany his obituary by Morrison (1975).

Before becoming an Oxford professor, he was known as Robin Zaehner. Peter Wright, Spycatcher (1987), pp. 243–244.

Ann K. S. Lambton, Richard Charles Zaehner in BSOAS 38/3: 823–824, at 823 (1975). She identifies his ancestry as "Swiss German",

Editorial insert, "The Author", in Zaehner, The Teaching of the Magi (1956; 1976), p. 5 (bilingual).

R.C.Zaehner, Mysticism, Sacred and Profane, Oxford University Press (1961) 1967 p.xiii

Zaehner called Prof. Bailey "perhaps the greatest Indo-Iranian philologist of our time". Zaehner's 1972 "Preface to the New Printing" to his *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (1972), p. vi. "My debt to him, as always, remains immense."

Alana Howard, "Gifford Lecture Biography."

Lambton, Richard Charles Zaehner in BSOAS (1975).

Michael Dummett, "Introduction" pp. xi–xix, at p. xiii (quote), to Zaehner's posthumous *The City within the Heart* (1981).

Geoffrey Parrinder, "Robert Charles Zaehner (1913–1974)" in *History of Religion* 16: 66–74, 74 (1976).

Nigel West, *At Her Majesty's Secret Service. The chiefs of Britain's intelligence agency MI6* (Naval Institute Press 2006) at 117. Nigel West is the pen name of Rupert Allason.

Peter Wright, *Spycatcher. The candid autobiography of a senior intelligence officer, with Paul Greengrass* (Richmond: Heinemann Australia 1987), pp. 243–246, at 244–245 (quote).

Encyclopædia Britannica, "R. C. Zaehner" {website}.

Christopher de Bellaigue, *Patriot of Persia. Muhammad Mossadegh and a tragic Anglo-American coup* (2012). pp. 193–194 (Lambton), p. 194 (description of Zaehner, Martin quote).

Ann Lambton, *RCZ* (1975), p. 623. In Iran stationed at the British Embassy during 1943–1947, and 1951–1952. Zaehner enjoyed a "large number of Persian friends."

'Ali Mirdrakvandi, an Iranian peasant from Luristan, worked awhile for Zaehner. He wrote a fantastic story in his self-taught English. It was later edited by John Hemming and published, with a foreword by Zaehner, as *No Heaven for Gunga Din. Consisting of the British and American Officers' Book* (London: Victor Gallancz 1965).

Cf., Zaehner, "Zoroastrian survivals in Iranian folklore" (1965), pp. 87–96, at 88–89 re 'Ali Mirdrakvandi and his book. Also: *Part II* (1992).

Mehrzaad Boroujerdi, Iranian Intellectuals and the West. The tormented triumph of nativism (Syracuse Univ. 1996) at 33, 38–39. The 1951 coup staged by Britain alone failed due to Mossadegh's popularity and Iranian nationalism. Later in 1953 a joint American and British coup toppled Mossadegh, returned the Shah to power, and restored oilfields to Britain, but henceforth other countries, too. Yett the coup sowed the seeds of a lasting mistrust.

Robert Fisk, "Another Fine Mess" Archived 29 October 2008 at the Wayback Machine, Information Clearing House (2003). "It was Zaehner who had cultivated the Rashidian brothers, each of whom had worked against German influence in Iran during the Second World War." They were key players in the 1951 coup attempt. Fisk knew Robin Zaehner, "the British classics scholar who helped mastermind it."

During the 1951 attempted overthrow, Zaehner is said to have enlisted support of politicians, editors, aristocrats, army officers, tribal chiefs, businessmen, and others, including several associates of Mossadegh. Ervand Abrahamian, Komeinism (1993) cited in N.C.R.I.-F.A.C.

de Bellaigue, Patriot of Persia (2012), pp. 193–195, 197.

Fakhreddin Azimi, The Quest for Democracy in Iran. A century of struggle against authoritarian rule (Harvard University 2008), p. 153. "The defeat of [Mossadegh's civic-nationalist] movement was a watershed that marked renewed antagonism between the rulers and the ruled, as well as intensified abhorrence of Western imperialism."

de Bellaigue, Patriot of Persia (2012), pp. 271-278.

Cereti (1957), ¶¶17-20.

Peter Wright, Spycatcher (1987) at 245–246. Wright states that, "I felt bitter at the ease with which the accusation had been made," and for his subjecting a loyal colleague to hearing the false charges made against him. "In that moment the civilized cradle of Oxford disintegrated around him; he was back behind the lines again, surrounded by enemies, alone and double-crossed" (p. 246 quote).

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p. 6 (quote).

de Bellaigue, Patriot of Persia (2012), p. 194. The job MI6 gave to Zaehner in

Tehran was "ugly: to sow chaos in the heart of a sovereign government."

Jeffrey Kripal, Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom (2001), p. 162. Kripal comments on Zaehner's Gifford lectures and his earlier Spalding inaugural lecture.

Wright, Spycatcher (1987), p. 245. Wright mentions an apparently contrary view: "The cords which bind Oxford and British Intelligence together are strong."

Dummett, "Introduction" (1981) p. xviii.

Kripal (2001), p.198 (heart attack).

Cf., Lambton (1975).

Zaehner, Zurvan, a Zoroastrian dilemma (1955).

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p. 8.

Sarvepalli Gopal, Radhakrishnan. A Biography (Delhi: Oxford University Press 1989), pp. 249–250, 257 (VP); 304–307 (P); during his last three years at Oxford, Radhakrishnan had served concurrently as India's ambassador to the Soviet Union (pp. 213–215, 228, 248, 257). He was the first Spalding professor, starting in 1936 (pp. 132–133, 145).

S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought (Oxford University 1939, 2d ed. 1940; 1960), p. 20. Regarding his Spalding post: "the unprecedented appointment of an Asian to the Oxford Chair [is] motivated, I take it, by a desire to lift Eastern Thought... [indicating] its enduring value as a living force in shaping the soul of the modern man."

Vishwanath S. Naravane, Modern Indian Thought (New Delhi: Orient Longman 1978), p. 249. Radhakrishnan's "role has been described as that of a 'liaison officer' between East and West... as a 'philosophical bilinguist'... as a bridge builder facilitating intellectual commerce... ."

Zaehner's 1953 Spalding lecture, "Foolishness to the Greeks", was incorporated as an Appendix, pp. 428–443, in his book Concordant Discord (1970).

Michael Dummett, "Introduction" (1981) to Zaehner's posthumous The City

within the Heart, at pp. xii-xiii, p. xii (quotes).

Cf. Gopal, Radhakrishnan (1989). During the last decades of the Indian independence movement, Prof. Radhakrishnan had criticized Christianity's unique claims (pp. 39–44, 195–197). He promoted an optimistic view of "a shrinking world" in which his generation would provide "spiritual oneness and create an integrated human community" (p. 149 quote). His *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford 1939) discussed, e.g., Hindu influence on the ancient Greeks, and "common elements in Christianity and Hinduism" (pp. 159–160).

See Zoroastrian sections below.

Zaehner, *Zurvan* (reissued 1972) "Preface to the New Printing", pp. v (quote) and vi (Hinduism and Buddhism).

Cf. Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* (2001), p. 189.

Fernandes, *The Hindu mystical experience* (2004), p.6 (BBC talks, lectures abroad), pp. 10–11 (writing on drug mysticism).

See Popular & drug culture section below.

Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* (2001), p. 181 (quote).

See Gifford Lecture section below.

Dummett, "Introduction" (1981), pp. xiii-xiv (quote).

Newell, *Struggle and Submission. R. C. Zaehner on mysticisms* (1981), p. iv (quote).

Lambton, "Obituary" (1975), p. 624 (quote).

Dummett, "Introduction" (1981) at xi (quotes). Prof. Dummett here may refer especially to Zaehner's later, more popularizing books, e.g., on those counterculture drug users who associated their experience with mysticism. Yet Zaehner's work shed light on many regions.

Smith, "Review of *Concordant Discord*, in *The Journal of Religion*, v.53 (1973), p.381; in Newell (1981), p.iii.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 6 & 7 (quotes).

Gregory Baum, "Foreword" to Newell (1981), p. xi.

Zaehner, Zurvan (1955, 1972). The oldest reference for Zurvan found dates to the 12th (name), and 4th (sources unclear) centuries BCE (p. 20). Zurvanism had been installed at start of Sasanid rule as its state religion (p. 90), yet its status varied (pp. 112–113).

Touraj Daryaee, Sasanian Iran 224–651 CE (Mazda Publishers, Costa Mesa 2008), King Ardaxsir I founded Sasanid rule as Zoroastrian, with labors by the priest Kerdir (p. 16); Zurvan in edict (p. 62).

Zaehner differs with Mary Boyce as to whether, during the prior Parthian period (247 BCE to 224 CE) in Iran, Zoroastrianism survived if not flourished, or was little practiced, confused and inauthentic. Zaehner chose the latter (the Sasanians "restored the Zoroastrian faith"). Compare: her Zoroastrians. Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1979, 1985), pp. 80–82; and, his Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (1961), pp. at 22 (quote), 175.

Zaehner, Zurvan (1955, 1972), pp. 3–5 (dualism of Zoroaster, and development of Zurvan).

Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (1961) at 34, 42–46 (Zoroaster's teaching); 178–183, 246–247 (Zoroastrian sects).

Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians. Their religious belief and practices (1979), dualism: pp. 19–21, cf. 9–10; Zurvan heresy: pp. 67–70, 112–113, 118–123.

Alessandro Bausani, Persia religiosa (Milano 1959, Rome 1960), translated as Religion in Iran (New York: Bibliotheca Persica 2000), pp. 42–47, 63 (Zurvan).

Zaehner, Zurvan. A Zoroastrian dilemma (1955, 1972): Zurvan supreme (pp. 90, 91 quote).

Farhang Mehr, The Zoroastrian Tradition (Element, Rockport 1991), moral dualism (pp. 71–76).

Zaehner, Zurvan (1955, 1972), finite Time, victory of Ohrmazd (pp. 106–107 quote, and 100–101); Zurvan as God (p. 219), as Lord (pp. 239, 248, 254).

A short (156 pages) book published by George Allen and Unwin for a series, Classics East and West.

Zaehner (1956), Chapter IV, pp. 52–66. The "main tenants" quote at p. 11.

Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight (1961), p. 25 (Gathas); p. 35 (quote "opposition"), p. 37 (quote "enemies"); p. 40 (quotes "settled", "marauding"); p. 42 (quote "Truth" and "Lie").

Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight (1961), p. 33 (dates [of Sasanian priests] were pegged to year of Alexander's conquests).

Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, *La religion de l'Iran ancien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1962) translated as *Religion of Ancient Iran* (Bombay: Tata 1973), pp. 99–100. Classic Greeks assigned his dates to 6000 years before Plato. The "native tradition" of the 7th century CE placed him 258 years before Alexander (early 6th century BC). The author here concludes 600 BC at the latest (concurrent with Buddha and Confucius), but perhaps 1000 BC per "linguistic evidence".

Josef Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Persia* (London: I. B. Tauris 1996), pp. 96, 272. Now "very few scholars" dissent to prophet's date of circa "1000 BC".

Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, volume 1 (Leiden/Köln: E. J. Brill 1975) at 190. Boyce notes that the 6th-century dates were suggested by Sasanian priests, but are known to be artificial. She favors an earlier dating, 1400 to 1000 BC, for the prophet Zarathushtra or Zoroaster. His Gathas are linguistically comparable to the Rig Veda, dated at 1700 BC, and the pastoral social economy described in the Gathas fits that time period.

Mehr, *The Zoroastrian Tradition* (1991), pp. 3–5. Mehr's discussion gives a date of 1750 BC for Zoroaster, stating reasons similar to those of Boyce.

Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight (1961), pp. 54-55 (Ahura Mazda); 45-46 ("mediating" quote), 71 ("aspects" quote).

See above: Zurvan section.

Zaehner, Dawn and Twilight (1961), pp. 37 (Varuna as asura, Indra as deva), 39 (asuras lawful), 66 (Ahura Mazda and Vouruna), 82-83 (laws of Zoroaster, asura), 132 (Rig Veda, Avesta). Regarding another subject, the application of Georges Dumézil's theories to Zoroastrian theology, Zaehner criticizes its accuracy (pp. 49-50).

Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, v. 1 (1975): Vedic deva and Avestan

daeva, Vedic asura and Avestan ahura (p. 23); deva Indra (p. 32), Varuna as asura (p. 36); the lawful Ahura Vouruna in Iran as forerunner of Ahura Mazda (pp. 48, 53); Zoroaster rejects the heroic warrior Indra as daeva, as "violent, lavish, reckless" (p.53).

Gherardo Gnoli, "Indo-Iranian Religion" (2004, 2012 update) in Encyclopaedia Iranica [2018-06-09]. Ahura/asura, daeva/deva distinctions (§15), after Zoroaster condemned polytheism.

Nalinee M. Chapekar, *Ancient India and Iran* (Delhi: Ajanta 1982), pp. 19-22: ahura/asura, daeva/deva, Iran/India.

Wiesehöfer, *Ancient Iran* (1996), pp. 96-97. The period between the Dawn and the Twilight was not uneventful. Scholars often differ over conflicting theories of Zoroaster's original message by turns compromised and transformed, a schism that split the religion, survivals of the preexisting pantheon, rise of Mithraism, and political opportunism. Also (pp. 134-135): the confusion added by a "loss of historic memory" during the Parthian era, a regional commingling of oral history and heroic tales.

Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight* (1961), pp. 181–184, 193–247 (Zurvan); pp. 284–301 (Sassanid state: the mean at 285, 286 & 289, 287: quotes; the treaty at 286–287, castes at 284–285); pp. 58–60, 299, 317-318 (Saoshyans); pp. 228–229 quote, 296, 302 (the Frashkart).

Cf. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol.1 (1975), p.232: Ohrmazd's cosmic triumph ushers in this "glorious moment" at the end of the era, "termed Frašo.kərəti (Pahlavi "Frašegird"), the "Making Wonderful". Humankind enters an eternity of "untroubled goodness, harmony and peace." Boyce on the "Frašegird": pp. 245 (and Nō Rōz), 246 ("perfect men in the perfect kingdom"), 291 ("the Last Judgment will take place, the earth will be cleansed of evil"), 292 (renewal).

Cf., Zaehner, *Matter and Spirit* (1963), where the Zoroastrianism of the Sasanid era is compared with the ethical vision of quasi-utopian Marxists.

1959 article at pp. 209-222,

The two related articles (1952, 1965), and its posthumous "Part II" (1992).

Chapter IV, "Prophets outside Israel" pp. 134–164, Zoroaster discussion at pp. 135–153 (1962).

Chapter 5, "Solidarity in God," pp. 130-156 (1963).

Chapter XIX, "Beneath the Sun of Satan" pp. 385–403, at pp. 387–394 (1970).

See Zaehner Bibliography. Zaehner, editor: Encyclopedia of the World's Religions (1959, 1988).

The Gifford lecture discussed below.

Discussed in subsection "'New Age' drug culture".

E.g., Muslim, Zoroastrian, Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, Shinto.

Zaehner, Foolishness to the Greeks (1953; 1970).

Academic study itself split into several diverse fields: hybrid sociological and anthropological works, evolutionary theories, contending philosophical analysis, rival psychologies, innovative proposals for harmonizations, updated traditional apologetic responses, ethical discourse, social political derivations, ideological substitutions.

Secular rationalism of the Enlightenment only aspired to a value neutrality, as it inherited or developed conflicting stands, e.g., Aristotle's prime mover, Descartes' radical doubt, Spinoza's pantheism, Hume's natural religion, Kant's rational critiques, Hegel's historicism, Kierkegaard's existentialism, Nietzsche's irrationalism, Freud's psychology (or Jung's), Weber's sociology (or Durkheim's), etc.

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), quotes: p.10 ("Any man"), p.9 ("Of the books"), p.16 ("In all"), p. 17-18 ("I have"), p.19 ("For what"). Cf. his critique of a plague of theology, pp. 15-16.

Cf., Zaehner, Comparison (1958, 1962), pp. 12-13: a rational agnostic seems somewhat self-disabled when confronting the finer points of the "basically irrational" nature of religion.

Cf., Fernandes (2004), pp. 8, 12-16, 198-200.

Cf., Zaehner, Christianity and other religions (1964), p.78: Venturing to compare the Neo-Confucian Li with the Greek Logos, Zaehner refers to Mahayana Buddhism and the Tao, and mentions the Hindu tradition.

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), pp. 10-11: In an effort at self-criticism,

he summarizes his comparative method: to contemplate non-Christian religions from the inside, then to correlate the resulting gnosis to Christianity ("at least as I understand it"). Hence, an inductive approach that suspends an absolutest Christianity, and sees the entirety of humanity's religious history as a kind of diverse symphony.

Zaehner, *Comparison* (1958, 1962), pp. 42-43 (Carl Jung), 49 (Wm. James), 76-78 (Aristotle and Jung), 174-175 (Mircea Eliade).

Kripal (2001), pp. 156-157.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 12-15, esp. p.15 re his limits on *Nostra Aetate*.

Shri Krishna Saksena, *Essays on Indian Philosophy* (University of Hawaii Press 1970), chapter "Professor Zaehner and the Comparison of Religions" at pp. 102-116. Saksena faults him for non-objectivity. Zaehner, however, had declared in his 1962 Preface that his book (original title *At Sundry Times*) was based on lectures which specifically required a Christian orientation; hence the book discuss "how a Christian should regard the non-Christian religions" (in a few books his aim had been other than a thorough-going objectivity). Prof. Saksena here pointedly described perceived defects, but was by no means abusive, writing Zaehner "often shows great insight" (p.105).

Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol.1 (Leiden/Köln: E. J. Brill 1975), pp. 164-165, re Zaehner on the Haoma sacrifice.

Cf., Sethna (1981).

Cf., Kripal (2001), pp. 192-194, re his view on conflicts in Zaehner's writings.

Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion* (1971), p.112: "[I]f the Church is indeed the 'mystical' body of Christ, living by the breath of the Holy Spirit, how are we to account for its disgraceful, blood-stained history?" The "root-sin of the Church has, ever since the conversion of Constantine, been its betrayal of its spiritual mission in the interests of worldly power" and its loss of "Christ's gift of love" resulting in its "criminal career of persecution and intolerance." ... The Church is "tormented by the wickedness" but "ennobled by the sanctity".

Reissued by Beacon Press, Boston, in 1962, as *The Comparison of Religions*.

Page references here are to this 1962 edition. The At Sundry Times title is from Hebrews, chap. I, verse 1 (p.28). Based on lectures at University College of Wales, which required relevance to Christianity. An appendix (195-217) is added (pp. 9, 10, 195).

This concludes a conversation between Humpty-Dumpty and Alice, at page 11 in the Beacon edition.

New York, Hawthorn; concurrently published in London by Burns and Oates as The Catholic Church and World Religions.

Zaehner, Christianity (1964), p.9: The Jewish teacher Gamaliel stated that nothing will stop Christianity "if it be of God".

Matthew 4, 8-10 is quoted by Zaehner, Christianity (1964), p.9, regarding the temptation of Jesus in the desert, by Satan who promised him all the kingdoms of the world.

Cf., Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), where Heraclitus, Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle are extensively discussed.

Zaehner, Christianity (1964), p.128 (term 'heathen'; Newman quote).

Acts 17:26-28, (St. Paul at the Areopagus in Athens). Zaehner (1964) then artfully quotes St. Paul's words to the philosophers (pp. 128-129).

Zaehner, Christianity (1964), quotes: first 129, three at 130, last 131. Zaehner further discusses the 'mystic mistake' at pp. .

Fernandes (2004), p.89 (spiritual pride may lead to barrenness).

Cf. Asin Palacios, St. John of the Cross and Islam (1981), pp. 11-14, 25: renunciation of 'expansion' (bast, anchura); 20-22: danger of "spiritual vanity".

Zaehner, Christianity (1964), p.22.

Cf. Michael Stoebe, "The comparative study of mysticism" in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion (New York 2015). Accessed 2015-4-22.

Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (1960, 1969), "Preface" at vii–viii.

Quoted at length is Martin Buber on mystical experience, at pp. 17–18 in

Zeahner (1960, 1969).

Surendranath N. Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism* (Chicago: Open Court 1927; republished by Frederick Unger, New York, 1959). His book is based on his six lectures: Sacrificial, Upanishads, Yoga, Buddhistic, Classical Devotional, and Popular Devotional (the last two on Bhakti). Starting in 1922, the University of Cambridge published Dasgupta's *A History of Indian Philosophy* in five volumes.

Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (1960, 1969) at 6–11. Zaehner credits (p.6) Dasgupta's *Hindu Mysticism* for the initial typology.

Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (1960, 1969) at 19, 6 & 10; (a) 7–9, 17; (b) 9–10, 13, 17; (c) 11, 14–16, 17–18.

Junayd at pp. 135-153, Ghazali at 153–175. Zaehner (1960, 1969).

E.g., Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957, 1961) at 168.

Cf., Dummett (1981), p. xiii.

Richard Maurice Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness. A Study in the Evolution of the Human Mind* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons 1901; reprints: University Books 1961, Dutton 1969), range of experience pp. 55-56; summary description 14, 65–66; exemplars: fourteen pp. 67, 69–209, an additional thirty-six 211–302. The 14: Gautama the Buddha, Jesus the Christ, Paul, Plotinus, Mohammad, Dante, Bartolomé Las Casas, John Yepes, Francis Bacon, Jacob Behmen, William Blake, Honoré de Balzac, Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter ('Christian' except 1, 4 & 5).

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 40-50.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), pp. 118, 149, 204; cf., 66-67.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 46–48.

Reardon (2011).

Newell (1981), pp. 1-5, 53-55.

Schebera (1978), pp. 20-24. Schebera includes among advocates of an accessible mystical unity of historically diverse religions: Ramakrishna (1836-1886), Carl Jung, and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (p.20).

Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim mysticism (1960, 1969), p.169. Zaehner dismisses the reductionism of Leuba, "his thesis that mysticism can be explained in terms of pure psychology without any reference to God as a reality distinct from the soul."

James H. Leuba, The Psychology of Religious Mysticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1925). In the Preface Leuba writes that the "hortatory, apologetic, and romantic character" of most literature on mysticism "accounts for its scientific insignificance." While using the factual arguments of Sigmund Freud, Leuba is not in total agreement with him. Later, at p.318, Leuba writes, "For the psychologist who remains within the province of science, religious mysticism is a revelation not of God but of man."

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p.85: sexual imagery in Christian mystics, in Hindu.

Zaehner, Zen, Drugs and Mysticism (1972), p.68. "there is scarcely a form of religious mysticism... in which sexuality does not turn up." He mentions commentary on the biblical Song of Songs. "Divine love and human love at their highest are both, it would seem, sexual, for sexual love surpasses even parental love".

Kripal (2001), re Zaehner: pp. 181, 183 (erotic), 184-185, 187-188 (gender). According to Kripal, Zaehner "privileges human sexuality as the locus classicus of the very highest stages of mysticism and sexual language as the most appropriate expression of these states" (p.183).

E.g., Sidney Spencer, Mysticism in world religions (Penguin 1963): "The Spiritual Marriage" in Christianity (pp. 253-256). The united oneness with deity is "not merely a passing experience" but "a permanent state of life" (p.25x quote). Later he quotes Jakob Boehme, "I was embraced with love as a bridegroom embraces his bride" (p.269).

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), p.120: soul as feminine, biblical and koranic God as masculine.

Kripal (2001), pp. 192-193: "In blunt terms" Kripal attacks this metaphor as "clearly a psychosexual product of patriarchy, which defines divinity as male, [and] essentializes women (and secondarily, male souls) as passive... ." The result is that male heterosexuals cannot be understood to act "as threats to a single male God."

Zaehner, Zen, Drugs and Mysticism (1972), pp. 68, 134-135.

Cf., Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p.160: The human-divine relationship in 'spiritual marriage' is "the love of the bride for her spouse" and "the human role in relation to God is always that of female to male." In a Hindu sect, "the soul is regarded as the bride, and God as the bridegroom" (p.168).

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), p.141 ("the soul as the bride of Christ").

Evelyn Underhill, Mysticism (London 1911, reprint Dutton 1961), p.426: from Orphic mysteries to Christianity, "the Spiritual Marriage between God and the Soul". She then quotes Rumi.

Zaehner, his article "A new Buddha and a new Tao" (1959, 1967), subsection 'Jungian depth psychology' at pp. 403-406. Zaehner often referenced Jung's analytic psychology.

When Jung equates the "God-image" with the archetype of the "self", he is expressing in his own psychological terminology the old Hindu identification of the atman, the human soul or self, with the Brahman, the ground of the entire universe. Zaehner (1959, 1967), p.414 (quote).

Cf., e.g., Jolande Jacobi, The psychology of C. G. Jung (Zurich 1939; London 1942, Yale University 1943, 6th ed. 1962). An ego's animating figure (and entryway to the unconscious) is contrasexual, called for men the feminine anima, and for women the masculine animus. Yet a person's center of wholeness (the goal of individuation) is his or her inner unifying Self, an archetype that may function as a deified god image. Comparing terminologies can illuminate or confuse (i.e., work as near equivalents or not): the soul for the unconscious (ultimate source of the ego), and spirit for the unifying Self (conjoining both the conscious and the unconscious). For Christians Jesus may symbolize the Self; for Hindus the mandala.

Cf., Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), pp. 118-123. Here Zaehner enters on a sustained critique of Carl Jung's psychology. While praising Jung's ability to heal, Zaehner nonetheless alleges missteps per alchemy, the hieros gamos, the trinity's 'square halo', theodicy, Zoroaster,

pride and the split personality. "Jung takes from religion only what confirms and illustrates his psychology." (p.120 quote)

Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* ([1577]; NY: Sheed & Ward 1946, reprint 1989 by Image Doubleday), the fifth mansion concerns Spiritual Betrothal, the seventh Spiritual Marriage.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), p.320: provocative quote from her 'autobiography', *Vida de la Madre Teresa de Jesús* (1588).

Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* (Mahwah: Paulist Press 1997), translated and introduced by Frank Tobin.

John P. Dourley, *Love, celibacy, and the inner marriage* (Toronto: Inner City 1987), pp. 29-43: discussion of Mechthilde's writings, e.g., her being among the "brides of Christ" and the "frankly sexual nature of her imagery" (pp. 30-31), and the Trinity (pp. 34-36). At p.42 Dourley opines about Mechthilde, applying Jung's psychology: "the archetypal truth of celibacy lies in the immediate and unprojected experience of the contrasexual, and through it of the Self". Dourley (1936-2018) was a Catholic priest, a professor of religion, and Jungian analyst.

Dourley, *Jung and his mystics* (Routledge 2014), pp. 38-55 (Mechthilde, e.g., in context: the Beguines pp. 37-40; sexual imagery pp. 40-48; Eckhard pp. 49, 76; Jung pp. 48-51). "The process of intercourse with the animus, a divine/human figure in Mechthild's imagery, gives birth to the power of God in consciousness." "Mechthild was among the pioneers... to make this interiority conscious" (p.50, quotes).

C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (1912, rev. 1952; Bollingen 1956, 1967: CW, v5), p.90 (Mechthild quoted); p.433 (the hieros gamos, adopted by early Christianity).

C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types* (1921; Bollingen 1971: CW, v6), p.232 (Mechthild and 'Christ-eroticism'), p.237 (spiritualization of eroticism, libido and symbol).

Underhill, *Mysticism* (1911, 1961), p.92 (Mechthilde quote); but cf. p.267 re Angela of Foligno.

Fiona Bowie, *Beguine Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad 1990).

Francis de Sales, *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* [Treatise on the Love of God].

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs and Mysticism* (1972), p.69 (Zaehner quote, de Sales); pp. 66-68, 70, 79 (mystical states of religion compared to LSD, and sex).

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 158-169, 171 (sexuality: Hindu and Christian).

Cf., Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), p.152: the Virgin Mary "perfect as a symbol of the soul in grace and in love" is "enveloped and penetrated through and through by the Holy Ghost and made pregnant of the eternal Wisdom of God." At p.168: in the Hindu 'trinity' sac-cid-ananda Being Aware Bliss, the Brahman when viewed as bliss is ananda, which is variously defined, and also is "the ordinary word used for sexual pleasure".

Cf., Joseph Maréchal, *The Psychology of the Mystics* (Bruges 1924; London 1927, reprint Dover 2004), pp. 227-231: sexual pleasure as a possible element in the mystic ecstasy, experienced by the nonetheless chaste, whether religious or laity. "A kernel of truth is hidden under a mass of error" (p.230).

E.g., Zaehner, *The City within the Heart* (1981), p.114: "contrary to all ancient traditions, the moderns tend to regard the male as the more concupiscent of the two."

Sylvia Brinton Perera, *Descent to the Goddess* (Toronto: Inner City 1982).

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (Routledge 1992, 1998).

Cf., Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: William Morrow 1970).

Bernard McGinn, *The Varieties of Vernacular Mysticism 1350-1550* (New York: Herder & Herder 2012), pp. 38-47. Discussion of Jan van Ruusbroec and his "Bridal mysticism". Developed is the gospel parable of Christ as the groom, and as the bride the soul of the mystic. Prof. McGinn follows the text of his book *The Spiritual Espousals* (c.1340).

Jan van Ruysbroeck, *The Adornment of the Spiritual Marriage*. Nicolas-Hays, Berwick 2005.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), p.171. He paraphrases Jan

van Ruysbroeck: when the soul finds 'rest in God', the soul may become ablaze in God's love; then the soul's "living flame kindled by the fire of God is reunited with the divine fire".

Evelyn Underhill, Ruysbroeck (London: Bell & Sons 1914; reprint 2003), pp. 74-75, quoting from Ruysbroeck's The Mirror of Eternal Salvation (1359):

That measureless Love which is God Himself, dwells in the pure deeps of our spirit, like a burning brazier of coal. And it throws forth brilliant and fiery sparks which stir and enkindle heart and senses, will and desire, and all the powers of the soul, with a fire of love; a storm, a rage, a measureless fury of love.

Mommaers & van Bragt, Mysticism Buddhist and Christian. Encounters with Jan van Ruusbroec (New York: Crossroad 1995), pp. 148-149.

Zaehner, Mysticism: Sacred and Profane (1957), p.152. Otherwise sex may become "a desecration of a holy thing."

Kripal (2001), pp. 189-193, suggests as part of the story: Zaehner suffered from the era's bias.

Ann K. S. Lambton (1975).

Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), pp. 156-160, on Plato's roles regarding a pagan spirituality, as portrayed in Phaedrus, the Symposium, and the Laws (156-158); misuse of Yoga in a "jujitsu" of the body (158); and "the enforced uniformity of Soviet man" (159-160).

Cf., Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim mysticism (1960, 1969), p.6. See above, section "Mystical experience", subsection "Hindu and Muslim".

Dasgupta, Hindu Mysticism (1927, 1959). A typology of mystical practice and experience was derived by Dasgupta from the Hindu tradition, texts and literature.

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), pp. 66, 168*, 184, 192, 198, 204.

Zaehner, At Sundry Times (1958), p.172 (Samkhya-Yogin, Nature, Theistic,

Monist).

Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (1960), p.19.

Zaehner, *The Bhagavad Gita* (1969), p.2.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 59, 129, 199-204 (Hindu).

Zaehner, *Drugs, Mysticism and Make-believe* (1972), p.93.

Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (1958), p.172.

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen, Unwin 1923, 2d ed. 1930; reprint Oxford 1989, 2006), volume two. Samkhya and Yoga, and Vedanta, are three of the six orthodox Brahmanical Systems (pp. 19-20). These six "apparently isolated and independent systems were really members [that could not be completely understood] without regard to their place in the historic interconnection" (18-19). "The Samkhya is not a living faith" (p.28). "Vedanta determines the world view of the Hindu thinkers of the present time" (p.430).

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 199-200.

Reardon (2012), pp. 170-174.

Fernandes (2004), p.25, cf. pp. 23-25.

Newell (1981), p. vi.

Schebera (1978), pp. 87-100.

Kripal (2001), pp. 181, 187.

Reardon (2012), pp. 170-186, discussion regarding the complexities of the nature of Zaehner's "Isolation" type.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), pp. 28; 93, 118, 168,

Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper and Row 1954).

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), pp. 212-226: a December 1955 mescaline episode supervised by Dr. Smythies of the Psychological Laboratory, Cambridge, with the assistance of Mr. Osborn of the Society for

Psychic Research.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957, 1961), pp. 36-39, 42-44.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 41-42.

William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience. Being the Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh* (London: Longmans, Green 1902)

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs, and Mysticism* (1972), p.168.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 294-297.

Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Rascher 1962; London: Collins and Routledge & Kegan Paul 1963), edited by Aniela Jaffé.

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs, and Mysticism* (1972), pp. 90-1.

Zaehner, *The Comparison of Religions* (1958), pp. 91-92.

Martin Buber, *Between man and man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1947).

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957, 1961), pp. 50-83 (Proust and Rimbaud), pp. 30-45 (others).

Zaehner, *Our Savage God* (1974), pp. 63, 213 (Rimbaud).

Arthur Rimbaud, *Une saison en enfer* (1873) and *Les illuminations* (1886), in Fowlie, ed., *Rimbaud* (1966).

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 40-51 (Bucke), 201-202, 209-210 (Jeffries).

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs, and Mysitcm* (1972), pp. 50-60 (Jeffries), 60-62 (Bucke).

Zaehenr, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), p.140. The Hindu aphorism Tat Tvam Asi or thou art that, in referring the individual's unifying Self to the presence of the Deity, may describe the insight that completes the link. Cf., p.118. Such a bridge may otherwise be interpreted as going from nature to monistic mysticism.

Cf., Geoffrey Parrinder, "Robert Charles Zaehner (1913–1974)" in *History of*

Religion 16: 66–74, at p.74 (1976). Zaehner himself in his mid-twenties had intensely engaged Rimbaud, Jalal ad-Din Rumi, and the Upanishads; he was becoming a self-described "nature mystic". Eventually he converted to Catholicism.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957, 1961), p. xi, 22-23 (union of soul and God), 33 (satchitananda and the beatific vision), 37, 93-94.

Cf., Zaehner, *Our Savage God* (1974), pp. 10–12.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957, 1961), pp. v-vi, 1-29.

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Brothers 1945). Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York: Harper and Row 1954).

Cf., subsection "Comparative mysticism".

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), positive: pp. 37-38 (where he "rightly saw... the true nature of the soul"); negative: 438 ("manifest error"), 442-443.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957). Samkhya's understanding of the subjective self seen as an advance on nature mysticism (pp. 125, 109, 60-61).

Mircea Eliade, *Patanjali et le Yoga* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1962; [Eng.tr] NY: Funk and Wagnalis 1969, Schocken 1975). Samkhya is oldest of six darsanas (p.11). Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* sought to fit Samkhya teachings to traditional Yoga practice, hence their great similarity. While Samkhya is explicitly atheistic, Yoga darsana was known as "theistic" (Eliade's term, p.16), it allowed a small role for the deity Isvara as "guru of the sages" (pp. 73-76, 75 quote).

Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* ([1896], reprint Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970). "Samkhya philosophy [is that] upon which the whole of Raja-Yoga is based" (pp. 18-19 quote, 160-162). Samkhya darsana is one of Six Orthodox Hindu Astika (p.291). On Hatha Yoga: pp. 23-24.

Note Bene: The yoga tradition (as now popularly known) became transformed, to stress the Asana (posture practice) of contemporary yoga. Zaehner's interest, however, was yoga's Darsana (point of view), not its asana. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (Oxford 1970), p.97.

Mark Singleton, Yoga Body. The origins of modern posture practice (Oxford University 2010). "Today yoga is virtually synonymous in the West with the practice of asana" or postural yoga (p.3). "[P]opular postural yoga came into being in the first half of the twentieth century as a hybridized product of [its] dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement" (p.81). For example, Vivekananda (1863-1902) explicitly warned against Hatha Yoga, which he associated with asana or posture practice (pp. 4 and 70-75).

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), Yoga (pp. 96-99, 111), prakriti and purusa (98, 108, 124-125), gunas (98, 107-108), buddhi (108, 125), the mind or lower soul {Sufi term nafs} (102, 125), the body (125), ahamkara (108, 126).

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p.97, buddhi is the "highest and most subtle form of matter", as "the seat of cognition" it determines "right conduct".

Newell (1981), pp. 160-161, 167-170 (prakriti and purusa re Samkhya).

Kovoor T. Behanan, Yoga. A scientific evaluation (London: Macmillan 1937; reprint Dover 1959, 1964). "The doctrine of the plurality of souls in the samkhya constitutes an uncompromising departure from the monism of the Upanishads... ." The monist notion was that "Brahman was the only reality and individual souls were mere reflections... " (p.64). Cf. 49, 50. The author studied under Swami Kuvalayananda (pp. xix, 251).

Nikunja Vihari Banerjee, The spirit of Indian philosophy (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann 1974), p. 182-183 (the Samkhya's plurality of purusas).

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957). The Samkhya-yoga and the Advaita Vedanta may interpret differently what is a very similar mystical experience (pp. 146, 153, 164, 204). A major thrust of Zaehner's 1957 book is his typology, i.e., he demonstrates the actual variety of mystical experiences (of what many had assumed were the same); then he divides them into three or four categories (168,184,198). Yet, ironically, Zaehner here also shows that the same or similar experiences may be interpreted very differently, e.g., as Samkhya-yoga or as Advaita Vedanta.

Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim (1960), pp. 38-39 (Yoga and Vedanta compared).

Fernandes (2004), pp. 57-58.

Zaehner, *The City within the Heart* (1981), p. 21 (etymologies: Brahman, Atman).

Zaehner, *Hinduism* (1962, 1966), Brahman (pp. 36-56), the Brahman-Atman synthesis, "Brahman-Atman-Purusha" (49-50).

B. K. S. Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (London 1965, reprint NY: Schocken 1966), p.21. In not-Samkhya Hinduism, the individual yogin's "Antaratma (the inner self)" may be realized as connected to the sacred Paramatma (pp. 21, 23-24), also called the Brahman (pp. 314, 315, 325).

Fernandes (2004), p.35 (mystical experience similar, theological interpretation different).

Cf., John P. Dourley, "Jung's equation of the ground of being with the ground of the psyche" in *The Journal of Analytical Psychology* (Routledge 2011), v. 56/4, pp. 514-531.

Iyengar, *Light on Yoga* (1965, 1966). Iyengar declares that his view of yoga leads one to experience the "Supreme Universal Spirit" or Paramatma (p.21), and to a conscious state of "Supreme Bliss" (p.53). Cf. p.49: "union with the Creator". Thus, Iyengar indicates that his yoga does not follow Samkhya (it might be a hybrid Vedanta or Bhakti yoga).

Cf., Mircea Eliade, *Yoga. Immortality and Freedom* ([Paris 1956]; NY: Bollingen 1958, 2d ed. 1969), *Yoga & Samkyha* pp. 3-46, liberation 31; Isvara 73-76; in *Mahabharata* 146-149.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), pp. 173-174, 181, 203, 206; but 140; see chapters 6, 8, 9.

See below, subsection "Monistic, e.g., Vedanta".

Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (1923, 2d ed. 1930; reprint 2006), volume two.

Mysore Hiriyanna, *Essentials of Indian Philosophy* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1949, reprint Mandala 1978). The Vedanta is divided: Absolutist or Theist, i.e., Brahma understood either as a monism or as a god (p.152).

Fernandes (2004), pp. 41-57. About the Vedanta, "Zaehner focuses his attention primarily on Sankara's Advaita and Ramanuja's Visistadvaita." Both are non-dualist (p.41, quote).

Zaehner, City within the Heart (1981), pp. 141-142 (the bliss of Brahman: the ananda of "Sat-Cit-Ananda, Being-Thought-Joy").

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (1923, 1930; 2006), v.2, pp. 561-594: Maya, and Advitya (ignorance).

Rasvihari Das, Introduction to Shankara. Being parts of Shankara's commentary on the Brahma Sutras rendered freely into English (Calcutta: Firma KLM 1968, 1983). Brahman by Maya (illusion) and ignorance makes the world seem real (pp. iiiii-xiii, xv-xvii, xxiv).

Zaehner, Mysticism. Sacred and Profane (1957), p.143, pp. 134-135: "What the Samkhya calls prakrti (Nature)... the Vedanta calls maya or 'illusion'".

Newell (1981).

Zaehner, Hindu and Muslim (1960, 1972), pp. 94-95, 97 ("thou art that").

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (1923, 2006), v.2, p.282: even the purusa of the Samkya, however truncated, originated in the concept of the atma found in the Upanishads.

Zaehner, The Comparison of Religions (1970), p.193 (Sac, Cid, Ananda compared to the Trinity).

Radhakrishnan, Indian Philosophy (1923, 1930; 2006), v.2, pp. 539, 483, 539 (saccidananda); pp. 439, 687 (Tat tvam asi).

Schebera (1978).

Fernandes (2004).

Reardon (2012).

The experience of samadhi as understood in a mystical epistemology would not be utterly new but, paradoxically, constitute a person's discovery of a pre-existing, abiding identity to cosmic awareness.

Zaehner, At Sundry Times (1958), pp. 41-43 (Samkhya), pp. 93-94 (Vedanta

and Samkhya).

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and profane* (1957): two chapters discuss Theism and Monism, another two Mescaline (drug-induced states). The Triune Divinity of Christianity is briefly addressed at pp. 195–197.

William Lloyd Newell, *Struggle and Submission: R. C. Zaehner on Mysticism* (University Press of America 1981), pp. 5-6.

Zaehner, *Christianity and Other Religions* (1970), p. 147 (quote).

Beatific Vision; contra: Concordant Discord (1970), p.333.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 164-171, discussing Saiva Siddhanta, especially p.168.

Cf., Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and profane* (1957), pp. 151-152, discussing the union in terms of its analogy to sexual union.

Michael Dummett, "Introduction" (1981), p. xvi (quote).

Parrinder. *RCZ* (1975), pp. 66–74, at p. 74.

Pripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom* (2001), pp. 159–160.

Barend A. van Nooten, *The Mahabharata* (New York: Twayne 1971). The most influential work of literature in India; yet not a revealed text like the Vedas, but on par with ancient law books and puranas (p. 81). Written in Sanskrit (p. 52), by "the mythical saint Vyasa" ("arranger") about the 4th century BCE (p. 43).

"The Mahabharata is a strange kind of book," writes Zaehner. As a major hero "Yudhishtira shows sympathy" for criticism about the "injustice" in the caste laws (dharma) for warriors (kshatriya). Zaehner, *Hinduism* (1962, 1966), p. 108 (quotes).

Cf. van Nooten, *The Mahabharata* (1971), synopsis pp. 5-42.

Chapters 3 moksha, and 5 dharma.

Zaehner, *Hinduism* (1962, 1966), Yudhishtira: pp. 64-66 (moksha); 107-108, 111, 115-125 (dharma). Warrior caste karma (p.59), dharma (pp. 108–111, Yudhishtira's protest at 111). The Bhagavad Gita describes Krishna's

teaching to the Pandava brother Arjuna before the battle of Kuruksetra (pp. 92-100). Yudhishtira is "ordered to do so by the Lord Krishna", i.e, to "lie" (p.117, quote).

Cf. Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 180-185 et seq. (Krishna advocates war prompting Yudhishtira's dilemma, and opposition), pp. 154, 181 (following Krishna's urging Yudhishtira utters a "lie").

Buddhadeva Bose, *The Book of Yudhishtir* (Hyderabad: Sangam 1986), pp.66-70 (Krishna and Yudhishtira, at Kuruksetra), at 67 (the "half truth").

Zaehner, *Hinduism* (1962), Chapter 8, Gandhi at pp. 170–187, Gandhi and Yudhishtira at pp. 170-172, 174, 178, 179, 184. "Gandhi's dilemma was the same as Yudhishtira's". Was dharma a tradition, or was it his conscience? (p. 170 quote, p. 171). The book closes with the modern poet Rabindranath Tagore (pp. 187-192).

Hinduism (1962), Chapters 1, 2 & 4, 6, 7.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), Chapter IX, "The Greatness of Man and the Wretchedness of God", pp. 172–193, devotes attention to Yudhishtira (pp. 176-193).

See section below "Gifford Lectures".

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970): Yudhishtira and Job (pp. 178, 179, 355). The Book of Job proper becomes focus of Zaehner in Ch. XVII, pp. 346-355. Yudhishtira and Krishna (177–182, 184–185, 188–190); kshatriya's "duty of killing and being killed in war" (p. 176).

Book of Job, ch. 1; ch. 2, v. 1–10: God permits Satan to devastate Job and his family. Later without guile Job disputed accusations that he was being punished for commensurate sins, e.g., he says aloud to God, "You know very well that I am innocent" (ch. 9, v. 7).

Van Nooten, *The Mahabharata* (1971), p. 16 (quote).

The Mahabharata. 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall 3. The Book of the Forest (University of Chicago 1975), translated and edited by J. A. B. van Buitenen, Book 2, chapter 51 (pp. 125-127, at 125–126): Yudhishtira first agrees to the game of dice at Hastinapura. The second time Yudhishtira agrees to roll the dice, it is expressly stated because he cannot disobey his

elder, Dhrtarastra (bk. 2, ch. 67, v. 1–4; p. 158). Vidura and Dhrtarastra are his uncles.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970). p. 179 (quotes about the dice game).

Zaehner, *Hinduism* (1962, 1966), p. 107 (the fateful game of dice).

Bose, *The Book of Yudhishtir* (1986), pp. 26, 29:n1, 87:n1 (Yudhishtira rolls the dice, commentary). Among nobles of India then, dice games were an "addiction" or "chief indulgence", p. 29:n1.

Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970, p. 177 (quote: holy); p. 179 (quotes: defend, justify); p. 177 (Draupadi's quote about Krishna). Yudhishtira at first "defends the established order" (pp. 178–179). He prefers the brahmin's dharma over the kshatriya's (pp. 177, 179, 184, 188). Draupadi attacks Krishna (pp. 177-178, 347), attacks Yudhishtira (p. 186). Yudhishtira does not attack Krishna, but becomes disgusted with "a warrior's duty to kill," saying after the destructive war:

"Cursed be the kshatriya code, cursed be physical strength, cursed be violence through which we have been brought to our present pass. Blessed be long-suffering, self-control, purity, freedom from strife and slander, refusal to do another harm, truthful speech, the constant virtues... "(p. 184).

The Mahabharata [Bks. 2 & 3], trans. and ed. by von Buitenen (1975), Yudhishtira about the brahmins (cf. bk. 3, ch. 177; pp. 563-565). [under construction].

Zaehner (1966), *Introduction*, pp. v-xxii; e.g., *Upanishads*, pp. 33–245.

Reardon, *A Theological Analysis of R. C. Zaehner's Theory of Mysticism* (2012), pp. 134–135, at 135 quote.

The Bhagavad Gita with commentary based on the original sources (1966) by R. C. Zaehner, translated with introduction and appendix. Following a 40-page Introduction: Text translation pp. 43-109, Commentary 111–403, Appendix 405-464, (cf. pp. 4–5).

Zaehner, *The Bhagavad Gita* (1966). Quote re Vishnu (p.6); Sankara and Ramanuja (pp. 3, 4, 8; Ramanuja p.40).

Gopal, Radhakrishnan (1989), pp. 179, 204–205. His Spaulding chair predecessor at Oxford, Prof. Radhakrishnan, had published a translation of the Gita in 1948. Cf. Zaehner, BG (1966), p.1, n2.

Zaehner had written on Teilhard for his 1963 book *The Convergent Spirit*, American title: *Matter and Spirit*. Their convergence in Eastern Religions, Marx, and Teilhard de Chardin. See "Cultural evolution" and "Materialist dialectics" subsections below.

Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (Paris 1955; New York: Harper and Row 1959, 1965), was the book that established his public profile.

Zaehner delivered the same three lectures in Delhi, Calcutta [Kolkata], and Madras [Chennai], and at Christian colleges, and a fourth lecture at Madras University. These four lectures comprise his *Evolution in Religion* (1971). An Appendix contains his short meditation on Death (pp. 115–121), given at St. Stephen's College, Delhi.

E.g., Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Arya 1916-1920; republished: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 9th ed. 1996; reprint: Lotus Press, Wisconsin, 1995).

Radhakrishnan wrote in 1950, "Aurobindo was the greatest intellectual of our age and a major force for the life of the spirit." Quoted in D. Mackenzie Brown, *The White Umbrella*. Indian political thought from Manu to Gandhi (University of California 1958), pp. 124 [179:n7]. Chap. X on Aurobindo, pp. 122-138.

Vishwanath S. Naravane, *Modern Indian Thought*. A philosophical survey (Bombay: Asia Publishing House 1964; [rev'd ed.]: Orient Longman, Bombay, 1978), quote p.198. 1978 rewritten chapter on "Sri Aurobindo" at pp. 193-219, his biography at 195-198. Aurobindo also called 'Aravinda' (p.vi). Before Gandhi he advocated a spiritual basis for Indian politics (p.197).

Rudolph & Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (1969), p.193. Aurobindo's early career was as a top political leader in India.

Peter Heehs, *The Lives of Sri Aurobindo* (Columbia University 2008).

Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion* (1971), pp. 10, 11 (quotes). Aurobindo's teaching was a "clear break" from both Sankhya Yoga which "made the sharpest distinction between Spirit and matter" and from the Vedanta of

Sankara (p.10). Aurobindo retained the outlook of a political reformer and, e.g., with regard to caste, "makes a clean break with traditional values" (p. 29).

K. D. Sethna, in his 1981 book on Zaehner and Teilhard Spirituality of the Future, found Zaehner well-read and in "fine sympathy" with Aurobindo. Yet however "well-grounded" his grasp was not total, e.g. Sri Aurobindo was not influenced by Henri Bergson (pp. 9-10 quotes, 29-30 Bergson). Sethna was the editor of Mother India. Cf. section "Popular & drug cultures" for Sethna's stronger criticism of Zaehner.

Sri Aurobindo, On Yoga, part 2 (Pondicherry 1958), 6: pp. 105, 107–108, quoted by Sethna (1981), pp. 31–32, [37:n2+n3].

Joseph Veliyathil, The Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo. His idea of evolution (Alwaye, Kerala: Pontifical Institute 1972), pp. 50-51: Yoga accelerates nature's evolution of consciousness. "The liberation that Aurobindo's yoga aims at is not only personal but collective" (p.53).

Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (1971). The Power of Consciousness is also called the divine "descent of the 'Supermind'," a spirit of pure consciousness. Otherwise, without such a divine transformation of selfish humans, Aurobindo considered any utopia impossible, and that promised by communists as a vain illusion leading to tyranny (pp. 28-29, 30-31). Zaehner analogizes the Power of Consciousness (Supermind) to Jesus as Logos (pp. 35, 38-39, 77, but cf. 31); Zaehner further compares Christian pilgrim journey and sac-cid-ānanda [Being-Consciousness-Joy] (pp. 13, 48, 74).

Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (1971), p. 36 (quote).

Cf., Akash Kapur, Better to have Gone. Love, death, and the quest for utopia in Auroville (New York: Scribner 2021).

Haridas Chaudhuri, Integral Yoga (Wheaton: Quest 1965, 1970), p. 53: "Integral yoga represents the crowning fulfillment of the yoga systems of India." Hatha, Raja, Tantra, Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma are synthesized.

Naravane, Modern Indian Thought ([1964], 1978): The process of cosmic evolution is preceded by an involution (p. 207), by which the material world is infused with consciousness by the Absolute; thereafter comes the creative evolution. Eventually humans appear and advance until the Supramental

links us to pure consciousness, an Absolute: then everyone becomes transformed (pp. 204–205). Aurobindo's "aim is to combine the western and eastern theories of evolution" (p. 208). The divine goal of Yoga at p.203. "Humanity will be transformed into a race of gnostic beings" (p.212).

Sri Aurobindo, *On Yoga. I The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram 1957, originally in *Arya* 1914-1921). "The gnostic (vijñānamaya) being is in its character a truth-consciousness" (pp. 557-558). The state of gnosis "is impossible without ample and close self-identification of ourselves with all existence" (p.558). To "learn how to be one self with all" is key, "without it there is no gnosis" (p.559). Gnosis changes "all our view and experience of our soul-life and of the world around us" as it is "the decisive transition in the Yoga" (p.542). Yet we must "remember that the gnostic level... is not the supreme plane of our consciousness but a middle or link plane" (p.553).

Sethna, *Spirituality of the Future* (1981), p. 267: Such human collaboration [in evolutionary time] is a spiritual quest that "by a concentrated effort of the entire being [may] accomplish in a short time the results that, with less clear vision and less inward pressure, might take millennia."

Sri Aurobindo, *The Future Evolution of Man. The Divine Life upon Earth*, compiled with a summary and notes by P. B. Saint-Hilaire (Pondicherry 1963), e.g., pp. 25-29 ('Life evolves out of Matter, Mind out of Life, Spirit out of Mind'), 40-41 (reason and inspiration), 64-66 (justice and freedom), 72-73 (spiritual experience and inner realization), 93-94 (the power to transform our being), 123-126 (personality of the gnostic beings), 131 (wholly aware of one's self/being), 137-143 (entirely new and conscious human facilities).

Cf., Gopi Krishnan, *Kundalini. The evolutionary energy in man* ([1970], reprint: Shambhala, Boulder 1997), commentary by James Hillman. The experience of Kundalini yoga causes an evolutionary consciousness, pp. 11-17, 123, 248; (Hillman, p.95): similar to *Integra Yoga*.

Gopi Krishnan, *The Biological Basis of Religion and Genius* (New York: Harper & Row 1972), introduction by von Weizsacker. Refers to Sri Aurobindo p.77, (intro. p.39).

Cf., Michael Murphy, *The Future of the Body* (Los Angeles: Tarcher 1992), re Aurobindo, pp. 47, 173, 182-182, 187-190, 229-230, 553-554.

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970). Preface. Zaehner writes of the "missing link" between Zen and theism (p. 304), and "the Hindu bridge" (p. 297), as pathways to convergence.

Newell, Struggle and Submission (1981), pp. 24-33 (convergence, solidarity). A false convergence is also possible (p. 252).

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p. 383 ("unfashionable" quote), p. 7 ("force nothing" quote). Cf. p. 296-299: ecumenical strategies Christian and Zen.

For dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels: section below.

Zaehner, "A new Buddha and a new Tao", per section "Marxian communism and dialectical materialism" at 406-412; and his "Conclusion" 413-417, at 415-416, 417, in his Concise Encyclopedia (1967). Here Marxism is the "new Tao".

Zaehner, Dialectical Christianity (1971), pp. 32, 37-38 (Communist theory).

Cf., Gustav A. Wetter, Dialectical Materialism ([Wien: Herder 1952]; rev. ed., New York: Praeger 1958), pp. 554-561; at p.560: Communism a perverse "counter-church".

Herbert Marcuse, Soviet Marxism. A critical analysis (Columbia University 1958, Vintage 1961), pp. 128-130. The split of materialism into dialectical and historical was foreign to Karl Marx, but was orthodoxy in the Soviet Union, where as "codified into an ideology and interpreted by officials of the Party, [it] justified policy and practice" (p.129 quote).

J. M. Bochenski, Soviet Russian Dialectical Materialism ([Bern: Francke 1950]; 3d ed. rev., Dordrecht: Reidel 1963), pp. 102-103 (Communist party fights the class warfare on behalf of the proletariat). Called "diamat" in 'Soviet speak' it was the cutting edge of the ideology (p.1).

Leon Trotsky, Their Morality and Ours (New York: Pathfinder 1969), the 1938 title essay (pp. 15-53). The "proletariat" will or should follow "laws of the development of society, thus primarily from the class struggle, this law of all laws" (p.49).

Marcuse, Soviet Marxism (1958, 1961). The dialectical process "if correctly understood... will eventually right all wrongs" (pp. 129-130). Yet in the Soviet

Union there was "much room for personal and clique influences and interests, corruption, and profiteering" (p.97).

Cf., Tony Judt, *Reappraisals* (Penguin 2008), at pp. 128-146: his review of Leszek Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism* ([Paris 1976], Oxford University 1978), esp. volume 3 on Soviet rule.

Zaehner, "A new Buddha and a new Tao", p.412 (quote), in his *Concise Encyclopedia* (1967), quote at pp. 406-407 in 1997 edition.

Cf., Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism* ([1952]; 1958), p.209: Clearly, "throughout the whole of the Stalinist period Stalin himself was the only person in the Soviet Union who could ever dare to say anything new. In his lifetime, [his writings] were hymned in the highest superlatives... ." It was "altogether too flattering to him."

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (Paris 1960, 1985; London: Verso 2004), p.662. "It is true that Stalin was the Party and the State; or rather, that the Party and the State were Stalin."

Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (1958, reprint 1961), p. 130:

"A straight line seems to lead from Lenin's [notions] to Stalin's personal dictatorship--a road on which 'scientific determinism' gives way (in practice if not in ideology) to decisions on the ground of shifting political and even personal objectives and interests. Subjective factors prevail over objective factors and laws. However... [it's] complex... ."

Martin D'Arcy, *Communism and Christianity* (Penguin 1956), p.43: "according to certain critics, the supposed resemblances with the Catholic Church" occurred when Stalin centralized Soviet power.

Nicolas Berdyaev, *The origin of Russian communism* (London: Geoffrey Bles 1937, new ed. 1948; University of Michigan 1960), not only the Catholic, at p.143: "The Soviet communist realm has in its spiritual structure a great likeness to Muscovite Orthodox Tsardom." Apart from its vital mystical nature, the Church is also a social phenomena.

"The Church as a social institution, as part of history, is sinful, liable to fall and to distort [its truth], passing off the temporary and human as the eternal

and divine." Berdyaev (1960), p.172.

Zaehner, Matter and Spirit (1963), p.26 (Soviet atrocities).

Cf., Nicolas Werth, "A State against its People: violence, repression, and terror in the Soviet Union" at pp. 33-202, in Stéphane Courtois, et al., *Le Livre noir du communisme* (Paris 1997); translated as *The Black Book of Communism* (Harvard University 1999).

Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine. Stalin's war on Ukraine* (New York: Anchor Books 2018).

Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (1958, 1961). According to this critique, historically "terror may be progressive or regressive, depending" on its rational utility. "In the Soviet state, the terror [was] of a twofold nature: ...technical and business" for poor performance, and political for "any kind of nonconformity" (p.96, quotes). However, with industrialization, "terror becomes unprofitable and unproductive. ...what was implemented by terror during the Stalinist period, must now be normalized... in the moral and emotional household of individuals." (p.236).

Cf., *The Death of Stalin* (2017 film), and the Polish operation of the NKVD in 1937-1938.

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity* (1971), p.30: Marx and Engels, not Lenin.

Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism* (1952, 1958), p.553: There is "a great deal of difference between Engels and Lenin."

See section below: *Dialectical Materialism*.

Karl Marx, from the 'introduction' to his *Contribution to the critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844), in *Marx and Engels on Religion* (New York: Schocken 1964), pp. 41-42:

Criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism. . . . The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of people is required for their real happiness. . . . Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of earth... and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.

Cf., Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion* (1971), p.1 ("criticism of heaven" quote).

Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge University 1965), pp. 22-25 (Marxist socialism compared to Christianity).

Gustav A. Wetter, *Dialectical Materialism* (Vienna 1952; New York: Praeger 1958), pp. 555-561 (Communism and Christianity).

Charles C. West, *Communism and the Theologians* (1968), pp. 105-107. A 1940s essay by Walter Dirks argues that "the younger Marx led the way for Christian thinking" regarding "human relations in production" by describing "the real world of power conflicts and selfish drives". Accordingly, the younger Marx "calls the Christian to sober obedient realism about his responsibility in this world" (p.106 quotes).

Zaehner, 'A new Buddha and a new Tao' in his *Encyclopedia* (1967), pp. 402-412, the subsection "Marxian communism and dialectical materialism", pp. 406-412, in 1997 edition, revised as "Dialectical Materialism", pp. 393-407.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *Marxism and Christianity* (New York: Schocken 1968, reprint U. of Notre Dame 1984), pp. 7-43, 103-143.

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity*, pp. 6-8 (Teilhard's musings, matter-derived spirit).

See below, section "Cultural evolution".

See above, section "Sri Aurobindo".

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity*, p.32 (quotes).

Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature* ([1883]; 1925).

Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism. A critical analysis* (Columbia University 1958; reprint Vintage 1961), pp. 121-139. Soviet Marxists criticized for using the dialectic to "protect and justify the established regime" (p.139). Some philosophic innovations of Engels, taken up by Stalin, rejected (pp. 126-129).

Cf. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution* (Oxford Univ. 1941, 2d ed. Humanitis Press 1954, reprint Beacon, Boston 1960), "Preface: A Note on Dialectic" pp. vii-xvi, and pp. 312-322.

Zaehner, Concordant Discord, p.421: "In Russia all creative Marxist thought had been suppressed; and when it appeared... in Czechoslovakia, the tanks moved in."

Not to say, of course, that Zaehner and Marcuse were on exactly the same page.

Arthur Koestler's essay pp. 15-75 in *The God that Failed* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1949), edited by Richard Crossman: the mechanistic vs. the 'true' party dialectic, pp. 33-34, 47.

Cf., Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity*, pp. 53-56: an individual at times can fall ignorant of what humanity-as-a-whole seems to unconsciously know.

Alexander Yakovlev, *The fate of Marxism in Russia* ([1992]; Yale University 1993), pp. 9-10: fallacy of 'class warfare' theory of Marx: societies that harmonize their opposites.

Marx records an instance of his admiration of contemporary working people which seems genuine. In Paris in 1844: "Among these people the brotherhood of man is no phrase, but truth and human nobility shine from their labor-hardened forms." Quoted by MacIntyr, *Marxism and Christianity* (1968, 1984), p.43 (end of ch.IV).

Zaehner, *Dialectical Materialism* in his *Encyclopedia* (1997), pp. 398-399, quoting Marx and Engels, *The Holy Family* (1844).

Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism* (Columbia University 1958; Vintage 1961), pp. 24-31 (Lenin's then-updated version of Marxism).

Yakovlev, *The fate of Marxism in Russia* (1993), p.237 (quote), p.238: when used to justify violence and killing "utopia turns into a crime".

An upside-down Hegel in the materialist philosophy of Engels, the weaponized cynical ideology crafted by Lenin, Stalin's opaque screen of statistical misanthropy, Maoist guerrilla war then GLF famine and cultural mayhem, Deng's productive, sinicized mix of antinomies.

Cf., Lucien Bianco, *Stalin and Mao. A comparison of the Russian and Chinese Revolutions* (Paris: Gallimard 2014; Chinese University of Hong Kong 2018).

Zaehner more than once quoted Marx and Engels, *The Communist*

Manifesto (1848), their vision where the "free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." See *The Convergent Spirit* p.17; *Concordant Discord* pp. 258, 419; *Evolution in Religion* pp. 4, 34; *Dialectical Christianity* p.29.

Stéphane Courtois, et al., *Le Livre noir du communisme* (Paris 1997); translated as *The Black Book of Communism* (Harvard University 1999).

Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror. Stalin's purge of the thirties* (Macmillan 1968), *The Great Terror. A reassessment* (Oxford University 1990), pp. 484-489, tens of millions dead (p.486).

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity*, p.53: "Soviet Russia [destroyed] individual freedom in the interest of the un-free 'development of all'."

E.g., Teilhard de Chardin, *Comment je crois* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1969), translated as *Christianity and Evolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1971), reprint Harvest 1974).

Teilhard is referenced here per Zaehner in the subsection "Materialist dialectics" above.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), p.200 (Huxley on Adam).

Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (1954).

Zaehner, *The Convergent Spirit* (1963), p.16 (quote).

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity* (1971), pp. 9-11, 14-15.

Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion* (1971), pp. 1-2, 71-72.

Cf., Carl Jung, "Psychological approach to the dogma of the Trinity" (Zurich 1942, 1948; in *Psychology and Religion* (CW v.11, 1958) pp. 107-200, at 147-200: the Quaternity).

Jung, "Christ, a symbol of the self" in *Aion* (Zurich 1951; CW v.9ii, 1958, 2d ed. 1968) pp. 36-71.

Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Phénomène humain* (Paris 1955; New York: Harper Row 1959, 1965), introduction by Julian Huxley.

Zaehner, *Convergent Spirit* (1963), p.74: his critics claimed Teilhard was too

little concerned about orthodox notions of individual sin and evil.

Zaehner, *Dialectical Christianity* (1971), Chap. II, "Marxist evolution" pp.30-63, at 31: Teilhard, at 62: visionary dialectics.

Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (Paris 1959; New York: Harper & Row 1964), re comparative reappraisal of Marxist (newly-born force of transhumanization) and Christian (traditional impulse of worship) in essay "Faith" pp. 198-200, also "Heart" at 276-278.

Zaehner, *Evolution in Religion* (1971), pp. 180-184: Zaehner's harsh criticism ("his pipe-dream of humanity" 180, "the dropping of the atom bomb" 181, "failure to love his fellow-men" who Teilhard said seem "to live independently of me" 183). However "irritated" he admired Teilhard and his vision (p.188).

Lukas and Lukas, Teilhard. A biography (NY: Doubleday 1977, McGraw-Hill 1981), pp. 260, 277-278, 332. Teilhard favored the French worker priest movement, suppressed temporarily in the mid-1950s by the hierarchy.

Begun in France the 'worker priest' movement was similar to the Protestant Social Gospel started by Gladden and Rauschenbusch, the Catholic Worker Movement started by Day and Maurin, and Liberation theology in Latin America.

Zaehner, *The Convergent Spirit* (1981), p.16: Teilhard "brought the sacrificed Christ of the altar down into the laboratory, the workshop, and the factory."

The works of Carl Jung were often referenced by Zaehner, whether favorably as in *Concordant Discord* (1970), p.347-349 (re Job and Yahweh, but contra at p.354), and re Eden and human consciousness, or with disapproval as in *Hindu and Muslim* (1960), pp. 87-89 (re Samkhya), or as in *Mysticism* (1957), pp. 202-203 (nature of evil).

Convergent Spirit (1963), *Concordant Discord* (1970), *Evolution in Religion* (1971); *Dialectical Christianity* (1971): the evolving future of humanity. Of these only CD (1970) has an index.

Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1957), pp. 201-202.

Zaehner, *Convergent Spirit* (1963), pp. 44-67: Genesis and science, evolution.

Zaehner, Christianity and other Religions (1964), pp. 136-139, 140.

Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (1971), pp. 60-65: the garden, the sin and the knowledge, the fall.

Zaehner, Dialectical Christianity (1971), pp. 14-26: Genesis and Job; the serpent (pp. 20-21).

Cf., Teilhard de Chardin, "Notes on some possible historical representations of original sin" at pp. 45-55, in his Christianity and Evolution (1971, 1974).

Zaehner, Concordant Discord (1970), p.326 (quote). Zaehner next quotes Bucke favorably on same subject.

The Tao Te Ching (c.600 BCE), 38, is quoted by Zaehner a few pages earlier (Concordant Discord p.329), as he raised the possibility, regarding Adam's sin, that knowledge itself is evil, as it meddles with the original harmony of nature, the 'uncarved block' of the Taoists. Cited also is the traditional Jewish view of Adam's disobedience, p.333.

Cf., Erich Neumann, Depth Psychology and a New Ethic (Zurich 1949; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons 1969), p.66.

Zaehner, Evolution in Religion (1971), pp. 28-31. Religion is one primary vehicle for cultural evolution.

K. D. Sethna, The Spirituality of the Future (1981), pp. 257-260 (Aurobindo and Teilhard).

See subsection under "Hindu studies".

In Mysticism, Sacred and Profane (1957), Zaehner had discussed in a scholarly fashion the mescaline experience and eastern religions.

With Hindu and Muslim Mysticism (1960), Zaehner further articulated his understanding of comparative mysticism.

Zaehner's 1970 book Concordant Discord lays out on a broad canvas issues of comparative mysticism, the Interpenetration of Faiths.

Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, Richard Alpert, The Psychedelic Experience. A manual based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead (New Hyde Park: University Books 1966).

R. E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *The Varieties of Psychedelic Experience* (New York: Holt Rinehart Winston 1966), per Zaehner, *Drugs, Mysticism* (1972), e.g., p. 77.

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs and Mysticism* (1972), "Foreword" p.9.

Fernandes (2004), p.6 (quote). His 1972 book *Drugs, Mysticism and Make-Believe* [original English title] was "an expansion of three radio broadcasts" on BBC (p.265, n13).

Zaehner, *A City within the Heart* (1981), pp. 34-35: mystical states, Neo-Vedanta non-dualism of the Hindus, and Zen (practiced in America); p. 36: excess, the deity Indra as a killer in the Kaushitaki Upanishad, and his follower. Cf. excess in western religion, pp. 30-31.

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs and Mysticism* (1972), p. 125-127 re Zen, per Abbot Shibayama. Per Jiddu Krishnamurti, p. 115.

Abbot Zenkai Shibayama, *A Flower does not Talk* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle 1970), pp. 105-110, esp. 105-106, the "Self before you were born" p. 108; re Zaehner, *ZDM* (1972), p. 81.

Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (1939, 1960), pp. 102-103: "When the Upanishad says that 'sin does not cling to a wise man any more than water clings to a lotus leaf' it does not mean that the sage may sin and yet be free, but rather that any one who is free from worldly attachments is also free from all temptation to sin."

Zaehner, *Our Savage God* (1974), pp. 47, 288, 306 (Charles Manson's "mysticism").

Sethna, *Spirituality of the Future* (1981), in his Chap. 10, pp. 208-220, challenges Zaehner's criticism of "the idea of an amoral or immoral component in Indian mysticism" (p.210, quote). Sethna refers to Zaehner's *Evolution in Religion* (1971), pp. 18-20, which discusses "a state so rudimentary that self-awareness and the moral sense have yet to arise" (p.210, quote).

Zaehner, *Zen, Drugs and Mysticism* (1972), Leary: pp. 66-67, 69-75, 83-87.

Timothy Leary, *The Politics of Ecstasy* (1970).

Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), Crowley: pp. 40-47.

Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), Manson: pp. 47-72. Zaehner tells how Manson was underprivileged, son of a teenage prostitute (p.51), an ex-convict whose maleducation trickled down from local occult sects (pp. 46, 59). His enemy was society (pp. 48-50, 55-56, 306-307). He preached to die to the world, by exhaustion, drugs and sex, to break-down the ego (pp. 60, 62, 69), in order to attain an indifference (pp. 60, 66-67, cf. 80). So broken, his followers committed horrific crimes (pp. 47, 56, 67).

Ed Sanders in his The Family (New York: Dutton 1972; reprint Avon 1972) describes the occult indoctrination used by Manson, and his loopy rationale of the murders. Zaehner quotes it and obtained knowledge of Manson's crimes from it. Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), pp. 9, 45:n8, 61.

Zaehner, The City within the Heart (1981), chapter "The Wickedness of Evil" pp. 27-44, which begins with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and ends with Manson (pp. 35-44).

Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974), pp. 19-73.

Zaehner, Zen, Drugs and Mysticism (1972), pp. 133-134.

Cf. The Economist, June 25, 2011, "Acid Test. Research into hallucinogenic drugs begins to shake off decades of taboo" p. 95; e.g., medical treatments, biotechnology.

Cf., Weiner, 9 1/2 Mystics. The Kabbala today (1969, reprint 1971). Leary's "suggestion that religious experiences may be achieved by drugs... is likely to remind a traditional Jew of Canaanite paganism, which used all kind of orgiastic rites, including drugs, to produce states of so-called expanded consciousness. ¶ Nevertheless, the question persists... " (pp. 330-331). "The answer might go something like this: ¶ Make room for the aberant... who bear within themselves those spores of creation which society needs for its own regeneration" (p.333).

Zaehner, Drugs, Mysticism and Make-believe. William Collins, London, 1972. Its American title: Zen, Drugs, and Mysticism. Pantheon Books, New York, 1972.

Leary, The Politics of Ecstasy (London: MacGibbon and Kee 1970; New York: G. P. Putnam 1970).

French novelist Georges Bernanos (1888-1948) distinguished between lust and sexual desire (prior to the sexual revolution); he was not a mystic (p. 175).

Our Savage God. The Perverse use of Eastern Thought Sheed & Ward, New York, 1974.

The novel and film are discussed in unavoidable graphic language (pp. 19-73: 35-40, esp. 36).

Carlo Cereti (1976-1977). Our Savage God was "written on the emotional wave following the murder of the actress Sharon Tate and some of her friends by members of a cult led by Charles Manson."

Zaehner, Dialectical Christianity (1971), p.37.

See section above "Popular and drug culture" re footnote about Manson's life. Also, here (e.g., pp. 51–75).

Zaehner, Our Savage God (1974) p. 234 (quote).

Cf., Zaehner, Comparison of Religions (1958, 1962), p.30: "The prophet confronts the mystic: and each speaks a different language that is not comprehensible to the other."

Zaehner, "A New Buddha and a New Tao" pp. 402–412, at 403 (quote), in The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths (1959; 1967), edited by Zaehner.

C. G. Jung, Aion (New York: Bollingen 1959), in Collected Works, vol. 9, ii, re chap. IV, "The Self", pp. 23-35, atman at 32, and re chap. XIV, "The structure and dynamics of the Self", pp. 222-265, atman at 222-223.

Zaehner, The Comparison of Religions (1958) p. 152 (quote). "Haoma is both a plant and a god. ... As a god Haoma was the son of Ahura Mazdah, the Wise Lord (Yasna 11:4). ... The purpose of the sacrifice is to confer immortality on all those who drink the sacred liquid--the life-juice of a divine being pounded to death in a mortar" (pp. 152-153).

Cf., Zeahner, Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism (1961) at 85–94, re the Haoma rite.

Mary Boyce, A History of Zoroastrianism, vol.1 (Leiden/Köln: E. J. Brill 1975),

pp. 164-165. Boyce criticizes Zaehner's presentation of the Haoma ritual in his *Teachings* pp. 126, 129; and *Dawn and Twilight* pp. 93-94. She says he marshals scripture, and evidence on the divine presence, death, and resurrection in the Haoma sacrifice, so that it resembles "the Christian communion rite". "But if all the material is properly taken into consideration... its intention appears as something very different" (p. 164). She cites A. Berriedale Keith, *The religion and philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, vol. II (Harvard Oriental Series 1925, reprint 1970), pp. 332. Keith states that for the Brahman soma ritual, there was "no serious or real feeling for the death of a god" (p. 460). The same applies for the Iranian haoma (Keith, p.326, n2). Cf., Boyce (1975), p.165.

Zaehner, *Our Savage God* (1974) p. 235 (quote).

Cf., Zaehner, *Mysticism. Sacred and Profane* (1961), p. 49: his approval of Richard Jefferies, advocate of "a mysticism of soul and body", who opposed ascetic practices.

Cf., Zaehner, *The Comparison of Religions* (1958), p. 172: his disapproval of Hendrik Kraemer, who condemned wholesale all mystics for wanting 'to be like God'. From this attack, Zaehner defends mystics of Samkhya, nature, and theism, while questioning some divinity claims of monism. Cf. p.83 re Jefferies, "this prince of nature mystics" (p.85).

Zaehner, *Matter and Spirit* (1963), p.27 (quote).

Matthew 7:3, re the mote and the beam.

Cf., Zaehner, *Christianity and other Religions* (1964), p.147: "By their fruits shall ye know them." Yet some Catholic Church "fruits in the past have been bitter, rotten fruits that would, had it been possible, have corrupted the very tree, Christ, from which they sprang."

Zaehner, *Matter and Spirit* (1963) p. 199 (quote). Cf., p. 19: This book "does not attempt to be an objective study..., rather it is a subjective interpretation... seen from an individual angle within... the Catholic Church."

Cf., Zaehner, *Concordant Discord* (1970), p.360: "[T]o be a Christian you must be both a Marxist and a Buddhist, both Confucian and Taoist, for in Christ all that has abiding value meets."

Cf., Paul F. Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions*. Multifaith dialogue and global responsibilities (Maryknoll: Orbis 1995), preface by Hans Kung. This pluralist professor advocated for (a) mutual recognition by rival faiths of the other's spiritual insights, and (b) dialogue toward a unifying vision. Zaehner clearly demonstrated full commitment per (a), but is often censured by academics for his frank criticism of what he thought were 'unrealistic' expectations per (b).

Zaehner, *The City within the Heart* (1981) p. 136 (quote).

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 12 (11).7.9 (1072b), "And so we roundly affirm that God is a living being, eternal and supremely good, and that in God there is life and coherent, eternal being. For that is God." Quoted by Zaehner, *Our Savage God* (1974), p.194.

Bibliography

Zaehner's works

Foolishness to the Greeks. Oxford University, 1953 (pamphlet). Reprint: Descale de Brouwer, Paris, 1974. As Appendix in *Concordant Discord* (1970), pp. 428–443.

Zurvan. A Zoroastrian Dilemma. Oxford University, 1955. Reprint: Biblio and Tannen, New York, 1972.

The Teachings of the Magi. A compendium of Zoroastrian beliefs. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1956. Reprints: Sheldon Press, 1972; Oxford, 1976. Translation:

Il Libro del Consiglio di Zarathushtra e altri testi. Compendio delle teorie zoroastriane. Astrolabio Ubaldini, Roma, 1976.

Mysticism: Sacred and Profane. Clarendon Press, Oxford University, 1957, reprint 1961. Translations:

Mystik, religiös und profan. Ernst Klett, Stuttgart, 1957.

Mystiek sacraal en profaan. De Bezige Bij, Amsterdam, 1969.

Mystique sacrée, Mystique profane. Editorial De Rocher, Monaco, 1983.

At Sundry Times. An essay in the comparison of religions. Faber & Faber,

London, 1958. Alternate title, and translation:

The Comparison of Religions. Beacon Press, Boston, 1962.

Inde, Israël, Islam: religions mystiques et révelations prophétiques. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1965.

Hindu and Muslim Mysticism. Athlone Press, University of London, 1960. Reprints: Schocken, New York, 1969; Oneworld, Oxford, 1994.

The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1961. Translation:

Zoroaster e la fantasia religiosa. Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1962.

Hinduism. Oxford University Press, London, 1962. Translations:

Der Hinduismus. Seine geschichte und seine lehre. Goldman, München, 1964.

L'Induismo. Il Mulino, Bologna, 1972.

L'hindouisme. Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1974.

The Convergent Spirit. Towards a dialectics of Religion. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963. Alternate title:

Matter and Spirit. Their convergence in Eastern Religions, Marx, and Teilhard de Chardin. Harper & Row, New York, 1963.

The Catholic Church and World Religions. Burns & Oates, London, 1964. Alternate title, and translation:

Christianity and other Religions. Hawthorn Books, New York, 1964.

El Cristianismo y les grandes religiones de Asia. Editorial Herder, Barcelona, 1967.

Concordant Discord. The Interdependence of Faiths. Clarendon Press, Oxford University, 1970. Gifford Lectures 1967–1969. Translation:

Mystik. Harmonie und dissonanz. Walter, Olten/Freiburg, 1980.

Dialectical Christianity and Christian Materialism. The Riddell Memorial Lectures. Oxford University Press, London, 1971.

Evolution in Religion. A study of Sri Aurobindo and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Clarendon Press, Oxford University, 1971.

Drugs, Mysticism and Make-believe. William Collins, London, 1972. Alternate title:

Zen, Drugs, and Mysticism. Pantheon Books, New York, 1972.

Our Savage God. The Perverse use of Eastern Thought. Sheed & Ward, New York, 1974.

**The City within the Heart. Crossroad Publishing, New York, 1981.
Introduction by Michael Dummett.**

Selected articles

"Zoroastrian survivals in Iranian folklore," in Journal of British Institute of Persian Studies, 1952; reprinted in Iran, v.3, pp. 87–96, 1965; Part II, in Iran, v.30, pp. 65–75, 1992.

"Abu Yazid of Bistam" in Indo-Iranian Journal, v.1, pp. 286–301, 1957.

"Islam and Christ," in Dublin Review, no. 474, pp. 271–88, 1957.

"A new Buddha and a new Tao," in his The Concise Encyclopedia (1967), pp. 402–412. Jung,[1] Marx.[2]

"Zoroastrianism," in Zaehner's edited The Concise Encyclopedia (1967), pp. 209–222; also 1997 edition.

"Christianity and Marxism," in Jubilee 11: 8–11, 1963.

"Sexual Symbolism in the Svetasvatara Upanishad," in J. M. Kitagawa (editor), Myths and Symbols: Studies in honor of Mircea Eliade, University of Chicago, 1969.

"Learning from Other Faiths: Hinduism," in The Expository Times, v.83, pp. 164–168, 1972.

"Our Father Aristotle" in Ph. Gignoux et A. Tafazzoli, editors, Memorial Jean de Menasce, Louvain: Imprimerie orientaliste, 1974.

As translator/editor

Hindu Scriptures. Translated and edited by R. C. Zaehner. J. M. Dent, London, 1966.

The Bhagavad Gita. With commentary based on the ancient sources. Translated by R. C. Zaehner. Oxford Univ., London, 1969.

The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths. Edited by R. C. Zaehner. Hawthorn Books, New York, 1959. Reprints:

The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths. Beacon Press, Boston, 1967.

The Hutchinson Encyclopedia of Living Faiths. Century Hutchinson, London, 1988.

Encyclopedia of the World's Religions. Barnes and Noble, New York, 1997.

Notes

"Jungian depth psychology" (1967), pp. 403-406 (the 'Buddha'). Dropped sometime after 1967 Beacon Press edition, for reasons unknown. See also Zaehner's 1967 "Conclusion" at p.414.

"Marxian communism and dialectical materialism" (1967), pp. 406-412 (the 'Tao'). In the 1997 edition by Barnes and Noble, appears extensively revised as "Dialectical Materialism", pp. 393-407.

Criticism, commentary

A Zaehner bibliography is in Fernandes (pp. 327–346).

Books

Albano Fernandes, The Hindu Mystical Experience: A comparative philosophical study of the approaches of R. C. Zaehner & Bede Griffiths. Intercultural Pub., New Delhi 2004.

George Kizhakkemury, The Converging Point. An appraisal of Professor R. C. Zaehner's approach to Islamic mysticism. Always MCBS, New Delhi 1982.

William Lloyd Newell, Struggle and Submission: R. C. Zaehner on Mysticism. University Press of America, Washington 1981, foreword by

Gregory Baum.

John Paul Reardon, A Theological Analysis of R. C. Zaehner's Theory of Mysticism. Dissertation at Fordham University, New York 2012. {website}

Richard Charles Schebera, Christian and Non-Christian Dialogue. The vision of R. C. Zaehner. University Press of America, Washington 1978.

K. D. Sethna, The Spirituality of the Future: A search apropos of R. C. Zaehner's study in Sri Aurobindo and in Teilhard De Chardin. Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck 1981.

S. I. Sudiarja, The idea of God in Hinduism according to professor R. C. Zaehner. Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, Roma 1991).

Jeffrey John Kripal, Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom. University of Chicago 2001. Chapter III "Doors of Deception" (pp. 156–198) on Zaehner.

Shri Krishna Saksena, Essays on Indian Philosophy. University of Hawaii Prss, Honolulu 1970. Chapter (pp. 102–116) on Zaehner.

Michael Stoeber, Theo-Monistic Mysticism. A Hindu-Christian comparison St. Martin's, New York 1994). Esp. Chapter 5 "Theo-Monistic Hierarchy" (pp. 87–112) references Zaehner.

Articles

Carlo Cereti, "Zaehner, Robert Charles" in Ehsan Yarshater, editor, Encyclopaedia Iranica.

Robert D. Hughes, "Zen, Zurvan, and Zaehner: A Memorial Tribute... " in Studies in Religion 6: 139-148 (1976-1977).

Ann K. S. Lambton, "Robert Charles Zaehner" in B.S.O.A.S. 38/3: 623–624 (London 1975).

Morrison, George (1975). "Professor R. C. Zaehner". Iran. 13: iv. JSTOR 4300520.

Geoffrey Parrinder, "Robert Charles Zaehner (1913–1974)" in History of Religions 16/1: 66–74 (Univ.of Chicago 1976).

A. W. Sadler, "Zaehner-Huxley debate", in Journal of Religious Thought, v.

21/1 (1964), pp. 43–50.

F. Whaling, "R. C. Zaehner: A Critique" in *The Journal of Religious Studies* 10: 77-118 (1982).

Michael Dummett, "Introduction" at pp. xi-xix, to Zaehner's posthumous *The City within the Heart* (1981).

External links

R. C. Zaehner, *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (1961), Chapter 9: "Varieties of Zurvanism", at *Zoroastrian Heritage*.

R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan. A Zoroastrian Dilemma*. Oxford University, 1955. Reprint: Biblio and Tannen, New York, 1972. {Google}

R. C. Zaehner, "Zoroastrian survivals in Iranian folklore", 1952; reprinted in *Iran*, 3:87-96 (1965). {JSTOR}

J. P. Reardon, *A Theological Analysis of R. C. Zaehner's Theory of Mysticism*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 2012.

Anonymous, "R. C. Zaehner. British historian" at *Encyclopedia Britannica*, updated 4-1-2018.

Carlo Cereti, "Zaehner, Robert Charles" at *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Sept. 22, 2015.

Alana Howard, "Robert Charles Zaehner, 1913-1974, Professor, Oxford", at *Gifford Lectures*.

Anonymous, "Mysticism Sacred and Profane by R. C. Zaehner", at *Psychedelic Press UK*, 2012, 2015.

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

International

ISNI2VIAFGNDFASTWorldCat

National

United StatesFranceBnF dataJapanItalyCzech

[Republic](#)[Spain](#)[Netherlands](#)[Norway](#)[Latvia](#)[Croatia](#)[Korea](#)[Poland](#)[Vatican](#)[2](#)[Israel](#)[Catalonia](#)

[Academics](#)

[CiNii](#)

[People](#)

[Trove](#)[Deutsche Biographie](#)[DDB](#)

[Other](#)

[IdRef](#)[Open Library](#)[Yale LUX](#)

[Categories: 1913 births](#)[1974 deaths](#)[Fellows of All Souls College, Oxford](#)[Spalding Professors of Eastern Religion and Ethics](#)[British Iranologists](#)[British diplomats](#)[20th-century English philosophers](#)[Alumni of Christ Church, Oxford](#)[British Special Operations Executive personnel](#)[People from Sevenoaks](#)[Anglo-Persian Oil Company](#)[Converts to Roman Catholicism](#)[English Roman Catholics](#)[MI6 personnel](#)[20th-century English historians](#)[Zoroastrian studies scholars](#)[20th-century British translators](#)[MI6 operatives in Iran](#)[Mysticism scholars](#)[Translators of the Bhagavad Gita](#)

[This page was last edited on 20 October 2025, at 23:56 \(UTC\).](#)

[Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use and Privacy Policy](#). [Wikipedia®](#) is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

[Wikimedia Foundation](#)

[Powered by MediaWiki](#)

[Wikipedia](#)[The Free Encyclopedia](#)

Donate

Create account

Log in

Christian Bartholomae

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

icon

You can help expand this article with text translated from the corresponding article in German. (May 2024) Click [show] for important translation instructions.

Christian Bartholomae

Born Friedrich Christian Leonhard Bartholomae

21 January 1855

Forst ob Limmersdorf [de], Kingdom of Bavaria

(now Forstleithen [de], Germany)

Died 9 August 1925 (aged 70)

Langeoog, Weimar Republic

(now Langeoog, Germany)

Known for Bartholomae's law

Scientific career

Fields linguistics, Indo-European studies, Iranian languages, historical linguistics

Friedrich Christian Leonhard Bartholomae (21 January 1855 – 9 August 1925) was a German linguist, philologist, and scholar of the Iranian languages. He is best known as the namesake of Bartholomae's law, a sound law affecting the Indo-Iranian language family.[1][2]

Biography

Bartholomae was born in Forst ob Limmersdorf [de], then a part of the Kingdom of Bavaria, on 21 January 1855 to a forester father.[1] Initially educated in Bayreuth, he began studying classical languages at Munich University and Erlangen University, including under Friedrich von Spiegel. [1] Afterward, he studied at the University of Leipzig, focusing on Sanskrit and comparative philology.[1] He achieved his habilitation from the University of Halle[2] in 1879, where five years later he was appointed as a professor.[1] The following year, he left for the University of Münster,[2] before being appointed to a full professorship at the University of Gießen.[1] [2] During his time there, he developed and published his work on what would later be known as Bartholomae's law, solving a sound problem in Proto-Indo-Iranian.[1] He worked at the University of Gießen until 1909, when he was appointed the successor of his long-time mentor Heinrich Hübschmann at the University of Strasbourg. However, the same year, he left his appointment yet again to teach at Heidelberg University, where he taught comparative philology and Sanskrit until he retired in 1924.[1]

**Bartholomae died on the East Frisian island of Langeoog on 9 August 1925.[1]
[2]**

References

German Wikisource has original text related to this article:

Christian Bartholomae

**Schmitt, Rüdiger (15 December 1988). "BARTHOLOMAE, CHRISTIAN".
Encyclopædia Iranica. Retrieved 15 December 2023.**

**"Bartholomae, Christian". Hrvatska enciklopedija, mrežno izdanje (in
Croatian). Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža. 2021. Retrieved 15
December 2023.**

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

**Categories: 1855 births1925 deathsLudwig Maximilian University of Munich
alumniAcademic staff of Heidelberg UniversityUniversity of Erlangen–
Nuremberg alumniLeipzig University alumniAcademic staff of the
University of GiessenAcademic staff of the University of MünsterAcademic
staff of the University of Strasbourg19th-century German linguists20th-
century German linguists19th-century philologists20th-century German
philologistsGerman IranologistsPeople from BavariaPeople from the
Kingdom of BavariaPeople from the Weimar RepublicGerman
orientalistsLinguists of Iranian languagesLinguists of PersianGerman male
non-fiction writersLinguists of Indo-European languages**

This page was last edited on 10 August 2025, at 13:38 (UTC).

**Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the
Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of
the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.**

**[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of
Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)**

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

David Neil MacKenzie

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article relies largely or entirely on a single source. Relevant discussion may be found on the talk page. Please help improve this article by introducing citations to additional sources.

Find sources: "David Neil MacKenzie" – news · newspapers · books · scholar · JSTOR (April 2013)

David Neil MacKenzie

Born 8 April 1926

London, England, UK

Died 13 October 2001 (aged 75)

Bangor, Wales, UK

Occupation Linguist

David Neil MacKenzie FBA (8 April 1926 – 13 October 2001) was a scholar of Iranian languages.

Biography

Neil MacKenzie (he never used his given first name to be distinguished with his namesake father, David)[1] was born in London in 1926 and attended a succession of schools in Southern England. In 1943, aged 17, he enlisted in the British Army. In 1945 and 1946 he served as a soldier on the North-West Frontier Province of British India, where he learned Pashto. Thus acquainted with Iranian languages, he acquired a Bachelor's degree in New Persian and a Master's degree in Old- and Middle Persian at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) of the University of London. His PhD dissertation, Kurdish Dialect Studies (1957, published 1961–1962), established his reputation as an Iranist and linguist.[2]

At SOAS, MacKenzie was appointed Lecturer in Kurdish in 1955, a position that was extended to include all Iranian languages in 1961. He was promoted to Reader in 1965, a post he held until 1975 when he received an appointment as Chair of Oriental Philology at the University of Göttingen in Germany.

MacKenzie retired from that position in 1994 and settled in Bangor, North

Wales. Upon his return to Britain, MacKenzie was elected as a Fellow of the British Academy. David Neil MacKenzie died on 13 October 2001 in Bangor, aged 75. He was survived by three sons and one daughter.

Academic achievements

Even though MacKenzie was an acknowledged authority on Kurdish and medieval Khwarezmian, he contributed significantly to the study of other Iranian languages, such as Middle Persian, Sogdian and Pashto. MacKenzie's contribution to Pashto, Gorani and Kurdish, just to name a few, is the reason for a "former colleague's" description of "poor MacKenzie" as "the man who knows all the dialects and none of the languages." [2]

His Concise Pahlavi Dictionary (1971) was not only one of his most important works, but remains the authoritative lexicographic reference on the language of the 9th-12th century Zoroastrian texts. His Khwarezmian dictionary remained unfinished at the time of his death.

In his obituary, MacKenzie is noted to have been "a polyglot whose linguistic knowledge was remarkable in both range and depth. Generally recognised as the world's leading authority on modern Kurdish and medieval Khwarezmian, he also made distinguished contributions to the study of many other Iranian languages, including Pashto, Pahlavi and Sogdian, at the same time displaying enviable competence in non-Iranian languages such as Arabic and Chinese." [2]

See also

Iranian Studies

List of Iranists

Bibliography

"MACKENZIE, DAVID NEIL" at Encyclopædia Iranica, by Desmond Durkin-

Meisterernst

Sims-Williams, Nicholas (22 October 2001), "Obituary: Professor D. N. MacKenzie", The Independent, London, archived from the original on 30 September 2007, retrieved 31 March 2007

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

International

ISNIVIAF2GNDWorldCat

National

United StatesFrance2BnF data2ItalyNetherlandsNorwayVaticanIsrael

Academics

CiNii

People

Deutsche BiographieDDB

Other

IdRefYale LUX

Categories: 1926 births2001 deathsBritish Army personnel of World War IIIranologistsLinguists of KurdishKurdish languageAlumni of SOAS University of LondonAcademics of SOAS University of LondonAcademic staff of the University of GöttingenLinguists of Iranian languagesFellows of the British AcademyLinguists of Persian20th-century British lexicographers

This page was last edited on 31 March 2025, at 06:08 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Shayest na Shahest

Article

Talk

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Look for Shayest na Shahest on one of Wikipedia's sister projects:

Wiktionary (dictionary)

Wikibooks (textbooks)

Wikiquote (quotations)

Wikisource (library)

Wikiversity (learning resources)

Commons (media)

Wikivoyage (travel guide)

Wikinews (news source)

Wikidata (linked database)

Wikispecies (species directory)

Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name. Please search for Shayest na Shahest in Wikipedia to check for alternative titles or spellings.

You need to log in or create an account and be autoconfirmed to create new articles. Alternatively, you can use the article wizard to submit a draft for review, or request a new article.

Search for "Shayest na Shahest" in existing articles.

Look for pages within Wikipedia that link to this title.

Other reasons this message may be displayed:

If a page was recently created here, it may not be visible yet because of a

delay in updating the database; wait a few minutes or try the purge function.

Titles on Wikipedia are case sensitive except for the first character; please check alternative capitalizations and consider adding a redirect here to the correct title.

If the page has been deleted, check the deletion log, and see Why was the page I created deleted?

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Daena (Zoroastrianism)

Article

Talk

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Look for Daena (Zoroastrianism) on one of Wikipedia's sister projects:

Wiktionary (dictionary)

Wikibooks (textbooks)

Wikiquote (quotations)

Wikisource (library)

Wikiversity (learning resources)

Commons (media)

Wikivoyage (travel guide)

Wikinews (news source)

Wikidata (linked database)

Wikispecies (species directory)

Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name. Please search for Daena (Zoroastrianism) in Wikipedia to check for alternative titles or spellings.

You need to log in or create an account and be autoconfirmed to create new articles. Alternatively, you can use the article wizard to submit a draft for review, or request a new article.

Search for "Daena (Zoroastrianism)" in existing articles.

Look for pages within Wikipedia that link to this title.

Other reasons this message may be displayed:

If a page was recently created here, it may not be visible yet because of a delay in updating the database; wait a few minutes or try the purge function.

Titles on Wikipedia are case sensitive except for the first character; please check alternative capitalizations and consider adding a redirect here to the correct title.

If the page has been deleted, check the deletion log, and see Why was the page I created deleted?

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Avesta

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses of the word "Avesta", see Avesta (disambiguation). For the Swedish town, see Avesta (locality).

Avesta

Illuminated Iranian Vendidad Sade manuscript (MS 4060/RSPA 230) from Yazd, dated to 15 Ēsfand 1016 AY (1647)

Information

Religion **Zoroastrianism**

Language **Avestan**

Period **Avestan period (c. 1500–c. 400 BCE)**

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

icon Religion portal

vte

The Avesta[a] is the text corpus of religious literature of Zoroastrianism.[1] All its texts are composed in the Avestan language and written in the Avestan alphabet.[2] Modern editions of the Avesta are based on the various manuscripts that have survived in India and Iran.[3]

The individual texts of the Avesta were originally oral compositions.[4] They were composed over a long period of several centuries during the Avestan period (possibly ranging from 15th century BCE – 4th century BCE).[5] The written transmission began much later during the Sasanian era (224 to 651 CE), with the creation of the Avestan alphabet. The resulting texts were then compiled into the multi-volume edition of the Sasanian Avesta.[6] This edition was lost sometime after the 10th century CE, and only a small portion of it has survived, scattered across a number of individual manuscript traditions. The oldest surviving fragment of such a manuscript dates to 1323 CE.[7]

Unlike the Sasanian Avesta, which was organized thematically, the surviving Avestan manuscripts correspond to the different ceremonies in which they are used.[8] It is assumed that it was their regular use which ensured their survival to this day.[9] The principal text is the Yasna, which takes its name from the corresponding ceremony, in which it is recited. Extensions to the Yasna ceremony include the Vendidad and the Visperad.[10] In addition to

these High Liturgies, the Avestan corpus comprises shorter liturgical texts compiled in the Khordeh Avesta or "Little Avesta". Aside from the Yashts, these other lesser texts include the Nyayeshs, the Gāhs, the Sih-rozag and the Afrinagans.[10]

Name

The term Avesta originates from the 9th/10th-century works of Zoroastrian tradition in which the word appears as Middle Persian abestāg,[11][12] Book Pahlavi 'p(y)st'k'. In that context, abestāg texts are portrayed as received knowledge and are distinguished from the exegetical commentaries (the zand) thereof. The literal meaning of the word abestāg is uncertain; it is generally acknowledged to be a learned borrowing from Avestan, but none of the suggested etymologies have been universally accepted. The widely repeated derivation from *upa-stavaka is from Bartholomae, who interpreted abestāg as a descendant of a hypothetical reconstructed Old Iranian word for "praise-song" (Bartholomae: Lobgesang);[13] but this word is not actually attested in any text.

History

Zoroastrian tradition

The Zoroastrian history of the Avesta lies in the realm of legends and myths. The oldest surviving versions of these tales are found in the ninth to 11th century texts of Zoroastrian tradition (i.e. in the so-called "Pahlavi books"). The legends run as follows: The twenty-one nasks ("books") of the Avesta were created by Ahura Mazda and brought by Zoroaster to his patron Vishtaspa (Denkard 4A, 3A).[14] Supposedly, Vishtaspa (Dk 3A) or another Kayanian, Daray (Dk 4B), then had two copies made, one of which was stored in the treasury and the other in the royal archives (Dk 4B, 5).[15] Following Alexander's conquest, the Avesta was then supposedly destroyed or dispersed by the Greeks, after they had translated any scientific passages of which they could make use (AVN 7–9, Dk 3B, 8).[16] Several centuries later, one of the Parthian emperors named Valaksh (one of the Vologases) supposedly then had the fragments collected, not only of those that had previously been written down, but also of those that had only been orally

transmitted (Dk 4C).[16]

The Denkard also records another legend related to the transmission of the Avesta. In this story, credit for collation and recension is given to the early Sasanian-era priest Tansar (high priest under Ardashir I, r. 224–242 CE, and Shapur I, 240/242–272 CE), who had the scattered works collected – of which he approved only a part as authoritative (Dk 3C, 4D, 4E).[17] Tansar's work was then supposedly completed by Adurbad Mahraspandan (high priest of Shapur II, r. 309–379 CE) who made a general revision of the canon and continued to ensure its orthodoxy (Dk 4F, AVN 1.12–1.16).[18] A final revision was supposedly undertaken in the 6th century CE under Khosrow I (Dk 4G). [19]

Modern scholarship

Modern scholarship generally rejects the pre-Sasanian era Zoroastrian history of the Avesta.[20] Instead, there is now a wide consensus that for most of their long history, the Avesta's various texts were handed down orally and independently of one another.[20] Based on linguistic aspects, scholars like Kellens, Skjærvø and Hoffman have also identified a number of distinct phases, during which different parts of the Avestan corpus were composed, transmitted in either fluid or fixed form, as well as edited and redacted by the Zoroastrian priests.[21][22][23]

Time and place of composition

See also: Avestan period and Avestan geography

Geographical horizon of the toponyms found in the Young Avestan texts

The Avestan texts are grouped into two distinct layers; Old Avestan and Young Avestan, which belong to two different chronological strata.[24] Regarding the Old Avestan material, scholars consider a time frame for its creation between 1500 and 900 BCE to be possible,[25] with a date close to

1000 BCE being considered likely by many.[26] There are no geographical references in the Old Avestan texts, which makes it impossible to specify where they were composed.[27]

The Young Avestan texts, which form the majority of the extant Avesta, originated in a later stage of the Avestan period separated from the Old Avestan time by several centuries.[28] Scholars assume that this phase corresponds to a long time frame possibly lasting from 900 to 400 BCE.[29] In contrast to the Old Avestan texts, the Young Avestan parts contain a number of geographical references. As a result, there is a consensus that at least these texts were composed in the eastern portion of Greater Iran.[30]

Some texts in the Avestan corpus, like the Vendidad or the Vishtasp Sast, show pronounced grammatical deficiencies.[31] They seem to consist of proper Avestan phrases, which appear to have been pieced together by people who no longer had an active command of Avestan.[32] This indicates that these texts were redacted from earlier, now lost sources, after Avestan ceased to be a spoken language.[23]

Oral transmission

The Old Avestan texts must have crystallized early on, meaning their transmission became fixed.[23] During their long history, the Gathic texts seem to have been transmitted with the highest accuracy.[33] While the Old Avestan material was handed down as a fixed liturgical corpus, the Young Avestan texts appear to have been transmitted for some time in an oral tradition which was still fluid. This means they were composed partly afresh with each generation of poet-priests, sometimes with the addition of new material.[33]

At some time, however, this fluid phase must have stopped completely and the process of transmission of the Young Avestan texts became fixed similar to the Old Avestan material.[34] This second crystallization must still have taken place during the Old Iranian period, as Young Avestan does not show

any characteristics of Middle Iranian.[35] The subsequent transmission took largely place in Western Iran as evidenced by alterations introduced by native Persian speakers.[36] Scholars like Skjærvø and Kreyenbroek correlate this second crystallization with the adoption of Zoroastrianism by the Achaemenids.[37] As a result, Persian- and Median-speaking priests would have become the primary group to transmit these texts.[38] Having no longer an active command of Avestan, they may have decided to preserve both Old and Young Avestan texts as faithfully as possible.[39]

Written transmission

Main article: Sasanian Avesta

It was not until around the 5th or 6th century CE that Avestan corpus was written down by virtue of the newly developed Avestan Alphabet. This facilitated to the creation of a comprehensive edition of the Avestan corpus, namely the Sasanian Avesta.[7] This is seen as a turning point in the Avestan tradition since it separates the purely oral from the written transmission.
[40]

This edition was lost at some time after the fall of the Sasanian empire, and the oldest surviving manuscript (K1)[n 1] of an Avestan text is dated to 1323 CE.[7] The history of the Avesta until these first manuscripts appear is unknown,[41] but the post-Sasanian phase saw a pronounced deterioration of the Avestan corpus.[42] Summaries in the texts of the Zoroastrian tradition from the 9th/10th century indicate that the Sasanian Avesta was much larger than the Avesta that exists today.[10] Only about one-quarter of the Avestan sentences or verses referred to by the 9th/10th century commentators can be found in the surviving texts. This suggests that an indeterminable number of juridical, historical and legendary texts have been lost since then. On the other hand, it appears that the most valuable portions of the canon, including all of the oldest texts, have survived. The likely reason for this is that the surviving materials represent those portions of the Avesta that were in regular liturgical use and therefore known by heart by the priests and not dependent for their preservation on the survival of particular manuscripts.

Avestan studies

Avestan manuscripts became available to European scholarship comparatively late, thus the study of Zoroastrianism in Western countries dates back to only the 18th century.[43] Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron travelled to India in 1755, and discovered the texts among Indian Zoroastrian (Parsi) communities. He published a set of French translations in 1771, based on translations provided by a Parsi priest. Anquetil-Duperron's translations were at first dismissed as a forgery in poor Sanskrit, but he was vindicated in the 1820s following Rasmus Rask's examination of the Avestan language (A Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Zend Language, Bombay, 1821). Rask also established that Anquetil-Duperron's manuscripts were a fragment of a much larger literature of sacred texts. Anquetil-Duperron's manuscripts are at the Bibliothèque nationale de France ('P'-series manuscripts), while Rask's collection now lies in the Royal Library, Denmark ('K'-series). Other large Avestan language manuscript collections are those of the British Museum ('L'-series), the K. R. Cama Oriental Library in Mumbai, the Meherji Rana library in Navsari, and at various university and national libraries in Europe.

In the early 20th century, the Zoroastrian legend of the Parthian-era collation engendered a search for a 'Parthian archetype' of the Avesta. According to the theory of Friedrich Carl Andreas (1902), the archaic nature of the Avestan texts was assumed to be due to preservation via written transmission, and unusual or unexpected spellings in the surviving texts were assumed to be reflections of errors introduced by Sasanian-era transcription from the Aramaic alphabet-derived Pahlavi scripts.[n 2] The search for the 'Arsacid archetype' was increasingly criticized in the 1940s and was eventually abandoned in the 1950s after Karl Hoffmann demonstrated that the inconsistencies noted by Andreas were actually due to unconscious alterations introduced by oral transmission.[44] Hoffmann identifies[45] these changes to be due,[46] in part, to modifications introduced through recitation;[n 3] in part to influences from other Iranian languages picked up on the route of transmission from somewhere in eastern Iran (i.e. Central Asia) via Arachosia and Sistan through to Persia;[n 4] and in part due to the influence of phonetic developments in the Avestan

language itself.[n 5]

Manuscripts

Stemmatology yasna pahlavi

Stemmatology of the Pahlavi and Sanskrit Yasna manuscripts used by Geldner

After the loss of the Sasanian Avesta, the Avestan corpus survived through a number of manuscript traditions.[50] These manuscripts overwhelmingly correspond to specific liturgies in which they are used,[51] and it is assumed that this liturgical use guaranteed their survival.[52] The oldest surviving fragment of a manuscript dates to 1323 CE but most extant manuscripts date from after the 17th century.[53] Today, more than 300 such manuscripts are catalogued.[54] The most important analysis of Avestan manuscripts was provided by Geldner in his edition of the Avesta. In the Prolegomena to his edition, he provided a critical apparatus, detailing the stemmatology of the manuscripts he used.[55]

In modern editions, specific manuscripts are typically classified according to several criteria. One criterion is the liturgy, like the Yasna, Vendidad or Visperad, in which they are used.[56] Another criterion is whether they originated within the Iranian or Indian Zoroastrian communities.[57] In addition, manuscripts are classified according to their use.[58] Manuscripts for liturgical purposes contain the Avestan text plus liturgical instructions. They are called Sade or Sadah, meaning pure.[59] On the other hand, manuscripts for exegetical purposes contain the Avestan text jointly with a translation. Most exegetical manuscripts have a translation into Middle Persian, called Pahlavi.[60] But there are also some manuscripts with translations into Modern Persian, Sanskrit and Gujarati.

Editions

The corpus of Avestan literature was produced during the Old Iranian Avestan period and transmitted within an oral culture of priestly composition. [61] It was not until the Sasanian period, that the Zoroastrian

priesthood produced an authoritative edition of this corpus. This edition is described in the Zoroastrian literature of the 10th century, but was lost at some undetermined time afterwards.[62] Since then, no new authoritative edition of the scattered Avestan corpus has been produced by the Zoroastrian community.

After Avestan manuscripts became known in the Western world, several scholarly attempts were made to create a critical edition of the diverse manuscripts through which the, now much reduced, Avestan corpus had survived. The first critical edition was published in 1852 by Westergaard.[63] It was based mostly on the manuscripts collected by Rask.[64] Around the same time, Spiegel published an edition of the Zoroastrian High Liturgies, i.e., the Yasna, the Visperad and the Vendidad. Despite being smaller in scope and based on fewer manuscripts than Westergaard's edition, it is still considered relevant since it includes the Middle Persian translations jointly with the Avestan text.[65] Between 1886 and 1896, Geldner produced an edition of the Yasna,[55] the Visperad, the Khordeh Avesta,[66] and the Vendidad.[67] Although it lacked a few minor texts, included by Westergaard, it was based on significantly more manuscripts.[68] As a result, it has remained the standard edition of the surviving Avestan corpus to this day.[69] Overall, these works share the same editorial principle, which was to reproduce the earliest common ancestor of the manuscripts, [70] therefore going back as close as possible to the Sasanian Avesta.[71]

Since the publication of Geldner's edition, a number of developments have increased the need for a new edition.[72] On the one hand many new manuscripts have been found, in particular in Iran. These new manuscripts have cast doubt on the, up to then, established opinion that all extant manuscripts derive from a single Sasanian archetype or, at least, some later hyparchetype.[73] Furthermore, the surviving Avestan texts are nowadays recognized as a primarily liturgical corpus. This means the editorial principle of previous editions, i.e., the reconstruction of the Sasanian Urtext, does not apply. The surviving texts are instead increasingly seen as witnesses of a living liturgical tradition; a tradition which is much older and existed parallel to the exegetical tradition represented in the Sasanian Avesta.[74]

These developments led to the creation of the Avestan Digital Archive (ADA) and the Corpus Avesticum Berolinense (CAB). ADA is a digital archive, which as of 2013 has digitized already 150 manuscripts and made 80 of them online available.[75] Furthermore, CAB is a project which attempts to edit the manuscripts within their original ritual context.[76]

Structure and content

The Sasanian Avesta

Main article: Sasanian Avesta

First page of an Iranian Sade manuscript of the Vendidad, the only volume of the Sasanian Avesta (called Juddēwdād therein) which has remained intact until today

According to the Denkard, the Avesta of the Sasanian period was organized into 21 nasks (volumes). This division was to mirror the structure of the 21-word-long Ahuna Vairya manthra: each of the three lines of the prayer consists of seven words.[77] Correspondingly, the nasks are divided into three groups, of seven volumes per group.[78] Originally, each volume had a word of the prayer as its name, which so marked a volume's position relative to the other volumes.[77]

The first group of the nasks was the Gathic group. It contained the Gathas as well as long commentaries on them. It comprised the Stōd-yasn, the Sudgar, the Warshtmansr, the Bag, the Waštag, the Hadoxt and the Spand nask.[79] Of these nasks, the Stod-yasn is extant in the Staota Yesnya, which forms the central portion of the High Liturgies like the Yasna and Visperad (see below). Parts of the Hadoxt nask may be extant through the Hadoxt nask fragments, while most other nasks are considered to be lost.

The second group was the manthric group. Its content has been interpreted as connecting the first and third group.[80] It comprised the Dāmdād, the Nāxtar, the Pāzag the Raθβišťāiti, the Bariš, the Kaškaysraw and the Wišťāsp-sāst nask.[79] Only the Wišťāsp-sāst nask may be extant in the Wishtasp Sast manuscripts (see below).[81] All the other nasks are considered lost.

The third group was the legal group, meaning its content primarily covered topics of Zoroastrian jurisprudence. It comprised the Nikātum, the Duzd-sar-nizad, the Huspāram, the Sakātum, the Juddēwdād, the Čihrdād and the Bagān Yašt.[79] The Bagān Yašt contained most of the Yashts of the extant Avesta (see below), whereas the Huspāram nask contained the Herbedestan and Nerangestan texts, which are extant in the fragments collections (see below). The Juddēwdād nask is the only nask of the Sasanian Avesta which has survived intact through the Vendidad manuscripts (see below), meaning that both its Avestan and Zand have remained the same. Of the other nasks, only fragments may have survived.[82]

The extant Avesta

The extant Avestan manuscripts no longer follow the division into nasks as described for the Sasanian Avesta. Instead, they are typically associated with the specific liturgy or ceremonies they are used in. The following structure is derived from Geldner's edition of the Avesta. Unlike the Sasanian Avesta, which was produced by the Zoroastrian priesthood, this is a scholarly edition and it is consequently not canonical in a religious sense. It is, however, widely regarded to be the most important edition of the extant Avestan corpus and considered canonical for scholarly purposes.[83][84][85] In this edition, Geldner included the most important Zoroastrian High Liturgies, namely the Yasna,[55] the Visperad[86] and the Vendidad,[67] as well as the Khordeh Avesta,[87] a collection of minor liturgies, ceremonies and prayers aimed at lay people.

Yasna

Main article: Yasna

First two pages of the first chapter of the Yasna in Geldner's edition of the Avesta

The Yasna (from yazišn "worship, oblations", cognate with Sanskrit yajña) is an Avestan text recited during the primary Zoroastrian liturgy, namely the Yasna liturgy. It consists of 72 sections called the Ha-iti or Ha. Its central part, Yasna 14–58, consists of the Staota Yesnya, which formed one of the volumes of the Sasanian Avesta.[88]

Being the most important liturgy, the Yasna is attested through a large number of manuscripts, which are grouped into six different manuscript types: The (i) Indian and (ii) Iranian Pahlavi Yasna, the (iii) Indian and (iv) Iranian Sade Videvdat, i.e., manuscripts which describe the Videvdat liturgy in which the Yasna is embedded, the (v) Sanskrit Yasna as well as the (vi) Yasna Sade. In Geldner's edition, the Yasna is edited in the first volume of his series.[55]

Visperad

Main article: Visperad

The Visperad (from vîspe ratavo, "(prayer to) all patrons") is an Avestan text named after the Visperad liturgy in which it is used. The text is divided into 24 sections called Karde, which are interleaved into the slightly rearranged 72 Has of the Yasna during the Visperad liturgy.[89] For his edition, Geldner used 26 manuscripts, which fall into three different manuscript types. The first type are Vendidad Sade manuscripts of the Vendidad liturgy, which is an extension of the Visperad liturgy. The second type are Visperad Sade manuscripts, i.e., they contain the Avestan text of the Visperad liturgy. The third type are the Visperad Pahlavi manuscripts, which do, however, only contain the text unique to the Visperad liturgy, i.e., they lack the portions drawn from the Yasna liturgy.[90] In his edition, Geldner edited the text according to the Visperad Sade manuscripts.[91] It was published in the second Volume of his series.[92]

Khordeh Avesta

Main article: Khordeh Avesta

Khordeh Avesta manuscripts contain collections of Avestan texts, which are aimed at lay people.[93] They, therefore, differ from the High Liturgies, like the Yasna, Visperad and Vendidad, which are only performed by priest typically inside a fire temple.[94] The content of different Khordeh Avesta manuscripts can differ widely, depending on the choices made by the editor(s). Most manuscripts contain the five Nyayesh , the five Gah, a number of Yashts, the 30 Sih-rozag and the four Afrinagan prayers.[87]

The Niyayishns, abbreviated Ny., are five prayers for regular recitation by both priests and laity.[10] They are addressed to the Sun and Mithra (recited together thrice a day), to the Moon (recited thrice a month), and to the Waters and to Fire.[10] The Niyayishns are composite texts containing selections from the Gathas and the Yashts, as well as later material.[10]

The Gāhs are five invocations to the five divinities that watch over the five divisions (gāhs) of the day.[10] Gāhs are similar in structure and content to the five Niyayishns.

The Yashts (from yešti, "worship by praise") are a collection of 21 hymns, each dedicated to a particular divinity or divine concept.[95] They are extant through either pure Yasht manuscripts, which contain all 21 hymns, or through Khordeh Avesta manuscripts, most of which, however, only contain a selection of the most popular hymns.[96] Due to this inconsistent editorial practice, the Yashts are placed differently within the Avestan corpus by modern authors. In Geldner's edition, they are placed within the Khordeh Avesta.[66]

The Sih-rozag ("thirty days") is an enumeration and invocation of the 30 divinities presiding over the days of the month. (cf. Zoroastrian calendar). The Sih-rozag exists in two forms, the shorter ("little Sih-rozag") is a brief enumeration of the divinities with their epithets in the genitive. The longer ("great Sih-rozag") has complete sentences and sections, with the yazatas being addressed in the accusative. The Sih-rozag is never recited as a whole, but is a source for individual sentences devoted to particular divinities, to be inserted at appropriate points in the liturgy depending on the day and the

month.[97]

The Afrinagans are prayers recited during the Afrinagan ceremonies.[98]
The number of prayers in the manuscripts vary but most include four: the first in honor of the dead, the second on the five epagomenal days that end the year, the third is recited at the six seasonal feasts, and the fourth at the beginning and end of summer.[99]

Vendidad

Main article: Vendidad

The Vendidad (or Vidēvdāt, a corruption of Avestan Vī-Daēvō-Dāta, "Given Against the Demons") is an Avestan text which is used during the Videvdat liturgy. This liturgy is an extension of the Visperad liturgy, itself an extension of the Yasna. The text consists of 22 sections, called fragards. They are framed using the so called frashna, i.e., a discussions between Ahura Mazda and Zoroaster. The Vendidad's different parts vary widely in character and in age. Some parts may have been composed during the Sasanian period although the greater part is very old.[100]

The Vendidad originally was one of the legal nasks of the Sasanian Avesta, called Juddēwdād therein. This nask belonged to dādīg, i.e., legal, nasks and therefore, unlike the Yasna and the Visparad, it is a text dealing with laws rather than the record of a liturgical ceremony. Since the Vendidad includes all of the Juddēwdād nask, it is the only nask of the Sasanian Avesta that has survived in its original form.[100]

The text is extant through two different manuscript traditions. The first are the so called Vendidad Pahlavi manuscripts. They contain the 22 fragards of the Vendidad jointly with the Zand. This manuscript type is, therefore, considered to go back directly to the Juddēwdād nask from the Sasanian Avesta. The other type are the Vendidad Sade manuscripts. They described the Vendidad liturgy as it is performed. Consequently, they contain the Avestan text of the 72 has of the Yasna, the 24 kardes of the Visperad and 22 fragards of the Vendidad text.[100] For his edition of the Avesta, Geldner edited only the Avestan text of the 22 fragards.[67]

Fragments

In his seminal edition of the Avesta, Geldner included only the most important liturgical manuscripts. Other authors, however, did compile a number of minor or incomplete Avestan texts. They are often referred to as fragments. There are altogether more than 20 fragment collections, many of which have no name (and are then named after their owner/collator) or only a Middle Persian name.[101] The more important texts in this category are the Nerangestan, the Herbedestan, the Wishtasp Sast, the Hadoxt nask fragments. (see Sasanian Avesta) and the Pursishniha "questions," also known as "Fragments Tahmuras".

Translations

It is generally assumed that the Sasanian Avesta not only consisted of a comprehensive edition of the Avestan corpus but also contained a full translation and commentary in Middle Persian, called Zand.[102] This assumption is based on the observation that references to the Sasanian Avesta typically quote from the Middle Persian translation as well as the fact that those texts directly derived from it, namely the Vendidad, the Herbedestan and the Nerangestan, all include a Zand.[103] The translations of these surviving texts is generally considered to be the oldest and most faithful ones.[104]

After the Avestan corpus became known in the West, a number of scholarly translations have been provided. The oldest translation of the Avesta into English was provided in the Sacred Books of the East series by Darmesteter and Mills between 1880 and 1887.[105][106][107] In addition, Darmesteter also published a translation of the Avesta into his native French between 1892 and 1893.[108][109][110] These translations, however, were mostly based on the Middle Persian translation of the manuscripts.[111] In 1910, Fritz Wolff produced a translation of the Avesta into German.[112] This work was based on Geldner's edition and translated the Avestan text directly using Bartholomae's Altiranisches Wörterbuch. As a result, his translation is generally seen as superior.[113]

See also

Avestan, the language of the Avesta

Avestan geography, the geographical horizon of the Avesta

Avestan period, the time period of the Avesta

Zoroastrian literature

References

Notes

/ə'vēstə/, Book Pahlavi: 'p(y)st'k' (abestāg), Persian: اوستا (avestâ)

K1 represents 248 leaves of a 340-leaf Vendidad Sade manuscript, i.e. a variant of a Yasna text into which sections of the Visperad and Vendidad are interleaved. The colophon of K1 (K=Copenhagen) identifies its place and year of completion to Cambay, 692Y (= 1323–1324 CE). The date of K1 is occasionally mistakenly given as 1184. This mistake is due to a 19th-century confusion of the date of K1 with the date of K1's source: in the postscript to K1, the copyist – a certain Mehrban Kai Khusrow of Navsari – gives the date of his source as 552Y (= 1184 CE). That text from 1184 has not survived.

For a summary of Andreas' theory, see Schlerath (1987), pp. 29–30.

For example, prefix repetition as in e.g. paitī ... paitiientī vs. paiti ... aiiēnī (Y. 49.11 vs. 50.9), or sandhi processes on word and syllable boundaries, e.g. adāiš for *aṭ.āiš (48.1), ahiiāsā for ahiiā yāsā, gaṭ.tōi for *gatōi (43.1), ratūš šiiāoθanā for *ratū šiiāoθanā (33.1).[47]

e.g. irregular internal hw > xv as found in e.g. haraxvati – 'Arachosia' and sāxvan- 'instruction', rather than regular internal hw > ŋvh as found in e.g. aojōŋvhant – 'strong'.[48]

**e.g. YAv. -ō instead of expected OAv. -ə for Ir. -ah in almost all polysyllables.
[49]**

Citations

Vevaina 2013, p. 996: "The Avesta, conventionally referred to as the "Sacred Book of the Persians" is, in fact, an orally transmitted, liturgically based, corpus redacted by the Zoroastrian priesthood".

Boyce 1984, p. 1.

Hintze 2012, p. 419.

Skjaervø 2012.

Cantera 2012, "The Avestan texts were probably composed in Eastern Iran between the second half of the 2nd millennium bce and the end of the Achaemenid dynasty".

Kellens 1987, "The Sasanian Avesta. It has now been established beyond any doubt that the known Avestan Vulgate originates from a canon which was arranged and written down under the Sasanians".

Boyce 1984, p. 1.

Cantera 2012, "Almost all Avestan texts preserved in the manuscripts are ritual texts performed in the different Zoroastrian rituals".

West 1892, chap. Introduction: "[B]ut when, through conversion and extermination, the Mazda-worshippers had become a mere remnant, [...] they rapidly lost all their old literature that was not in daily religious use".

Boyce 1984, p. 3.

Kellens 1987a, p. 239.

Cantera 2015a.

Bartholomae 1904.

Humbach 1991, pp. 50–51.

Humbach 1991, pp. 51–52.

Humbach 1991, pp. 52–53.

Humbach 1991, pp. 53–54.

Humbach 1991, p. 54.

Humbach 1991, p. 55.

Humbach 1991, p. 56.

Hoffmann 1987, "Every Avestan text, whether composed originally in Old Avestan or in Young Avestan, went through several stages of transmission before it was recorded in the extant manuscripts. During the course of transmission many changes took place".

Kellens 1998.

Skjaervø 2009, p. 46.

Schmitt 2000, p. 25: "Die Sprachform der avestischen Texte insgesamt ist nicht einheitlich; es lassen sich zwei Hauptgruppen unterscheiden, die nicht nur chronologisch, sondern in einzelnen Punkten auch dialektologisch voneinander zu trennen sind[.]".

Daniel 2012, p. 47: "All in all, it seems likely that Zoroaster and the Avestan people flourished in eastern Iran at a much earlier date (anywhere from 1500 to 900 B.C.)."

Hale 2004, p. 742: "Current scholarly consensus places his life considerably earlier than the traditional Zoroastrian sources are thought to, favoring a birth date before 1000 BC".

Grenet 2015, p. 21: "Does the Avesta contain any reliable evidence concerning the place where the "real" Zarathustra (i.e., the person repeatedly mentioned in the Gāthās) lived? The answer is no".

Hintze 2015, p. 38: "Linguistic, literary and conceptual characteristics suggest that the Old(er) Avesta pre-dates the Young(er) Avesta by several centuries."

Skjaervø 2009, p. 43.

Witzel 2000, p. 10: "Since the evidence of Young Avestan place names so clearly points to a more eastern location, the Avesta is again understood, nowadays, as an East Iranian text, whose area of composition comprised – at least – Sīstān/Arachosia, Herat, Merw and Bactria."

Schmitt 2000, p. 26: "Andere Texte sind von sehr viel geringerem Rang und

zeigen eine sehr uneinheitliche und oft grammatisch fehlerhafte Sprache, die deutlich verrät, daß die Textverfasser oder -kompilatoren sie gar nicht mehr verstanden haben".

Malandra 2006, "[I]t is the piecing together of separately good Avestan phrases by someone who could not compose Avestan, yet who could produce, nonetheless, an intelligible statement".

Boyce 1984, p. 2.

de Vaan & Martínez García 2014, pp.5–6.

Kreyenbroek 2022, p. 202: "Still, the language of these Old Iranian texts stopped well short of evolving to a "Middle Iranian" stage, which suggests that they became "fixed" a long time before they were committed to writing in their present form".

Schmitt 2000, pp. 24–25.

Kreyenbroek 2022, p. 202: "The only way such a process is imaginable is a scenario where a small, authoritative group of priests taught these texts to another group of transmitters who had no prior knowledge of them. This would have been the case when Zoroastrianism first became influential in Western Iran, under Darius I".

Hoffmann 1989, p. 90: "Mazdayasnische Priester, die die Avesta-Texte rezitieren konnten, müssen aber in die Persis gelangt sein. Denn es ist kein Avesta-Text außerhalb der südwestiranischen, d.h. persischen Überlieferung bekannt[...]. Wenn die Überführung der Avesta-Texte, wie wir annehmen, früh genug vonstatten ging, dann müssen diese Texte in zunehmendem Maße von nicht mehr muttersprachlich avestisch sprechenden Priestern tradiert worden sein".

Skjaervø 2011, p. 59: "The Old Avestan texts were crystallized, perhaps, some time in the late second millennium BCE, while the Young Avestan texts, including the already crystallized Old Avesta, were themselves, perhaps, crystallized under the Acheamenids, when Zoroastrianism became the religion of the kings".

Schmitt 2000, p. 22.

Kellens 1987, "Of the history of the Avestan texts from the collapse of the

Sasanian empire and the oldest manuscripts in our possession little is known".

Kellens 1987, "We know that the Muslim conquest and the dispersal of the Mazdean communities caused a weakening of the religious tradition and a decline of the liturgical elocution, which caused damage to the written transmission of the Avesta".

Boyce 1984, p. x.

Humbach 1991, p. 57.

Hoffmann 1958, pp. 7ff.

Humbach 1991, pp. 56–63.

Humbach 1991, pp. 59–61.

Humbach 1991, p. 58.

Humbach 1991, p. 61.

Cantera 2013, p. 345: "Es gibt keine Handschrift die "das Avesta" enthält. Avesta wird die Gesamtheit von zoroastrischen Texten in altiranischer Sprache genannt, die in vielen einzelnen Handschriften überliefert sind".

Cantera 2013, p. 345: "Die meisten dieser Handschriften enthalten Sprechgesang zoroastrischer Liturgien".

Cantera 2022, "Most non-ritual Avestan texts were therefore lost at an unspecified time.

Boyce 1984.

Cantera 2013, p. 345: "Die Zahl erhaltener avestischer Handschriften beträgt mehr als 300".

Geldner 1886.

Kellens 1987, "[T]he names of the manuscript families indicate the text (Yasna, Visprad, etc.)".

Kellens 1987, "their origin (Indian or Iranian)".

Cantera 2015b, p. 41: "The manuscripts can be further classified according to their use".

Kellens 1987, "The manuscripts that contain only the Avestan text are called sāda 'pure'".

Cantera 2015a, "The manuscripts transmitting the preserved Avestan texts often also include their translation into Pahlavi [PT], the Zoroastrian Middle Persian language".

Skjaervø 2012, p. 5: "How were the Avestan texts composed? [The composers] reproduced, updated linguistically, and modified before or during performances according to the expectations of their times and places".

Kellens 1987, "The Sasanian collection of the Avesta and its commentary (zand) is described in chap. 8 of the Dēnkard; it was probably composed of three books of seven chapters [...]".

Westergaard 1852.

Hintze 2012, p. 420: "Westergaard chiefly based his edition on the manuscripts which Rasmus Rask had brought to Copenhagen [and] manuscripts from various private collections".

Schmitt 2002, "So Spiegel' edition [included], in contrast to Westergaard's work, the Middle Persian rendering of the Avestan texts, which are often important for understanding them".

Geldner 1889.

Geldner 1896.

Hintze 2012, p. 420: "Geldner had access to 133 manuscripts".

Gholami 2024, p.19: "Geldner's edition has been considered the canonical text to date".

Gholami 2024, p.19: "Geldner and Westergaard were of the opinion that all the surviving manuscripts had been based on one copy; thus, the aim of these scholars was to reconstruct the original text".

Cantera 2012, p. VIII: "N. L. Westergaard tries in his edition to reconstruct as

far as possible the original Sasanian Avesta. K. F. Geldner's edition had a similar purpose".

Redard 2021, p. 1: "During recent years certain shortcomings in [Geldner's] edition have been brought to notice by scholars, and some scholars have argued that it should now be replaced by a new edition".

Gholami 2024, p. 19: "The most important arguments countering Hoffmann and Narten's theory and critiquing Geldner's edition were based on the results of and fresh information derived from a number of previously unknown Avestan manuscripts, which came to light in Iran".

Cantera 2022, "In Sasanian times, there were two parallel collections: the Great Avesta and the Ritual Avesta. The extant Avesta known from the manuscripts derives from the latter".

Cantera 2013, "Seit einigen Jahren verfolgt das Avestan Digital Archive (www.avesta-archive.com) das Ziel, alle avestischen Handschriften online zu publizieren. Bisher wurden ca. 150 Handschriften digitalisiert, ca. 80 sind indiziert und online zugänglich".

Cantera 2020, p. 200: "This is the main aim of the Corpus Avesticum Berolinense. In this project carried out at the Institute for Iranian Studies (<https://cab.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/>), we aim to present an edition of the rituals in Avestan in two different ways: 1) a presentation of the ritual system still operating in Iran in the 16th century using mainly the evidence of the manuscripts".

Shapira 1998, p. 5.

Kellens 1987, "The Sasanian collection of the Avesta [...] was probably composed of three books of seven chapters [...]".

West 1892, chap. Introduction p. XLV.

Shapira 1998, p. 7.

West 1892, p. 24: "'The last number refers, no doubt, to the eight fargards still extant under the corrupt name Vishtasp Yasht, which probably consist of fragments of the Avesta text of this Nask".

Shaki 1993.

Hintze 2012, p. 419: "To the present day Avestan Studies largely rely on two monumental works[:] Karl Friedrich Geldner's edition of the Avesta of 1889–1896 and Christian Bartholomae's Altiranisches Wörterbuch of 1904".

Redard 2021, p. 1: "Geldner's edition, became the reference edition".

Gholami 2024, p. 19: "Geldner's edition has been considered the canonical text to date".

Geldner 1889, pp. 1–31.

Geldner 1889, pp. 37–277.

Malandra 2006.

Malandra 2000a.

Geldner 1889, Intro.

Geldner 1889, Intro: "The text is given according to the Visperad sada".

Geldner 1889, pp. 1-31.

Malandra 2000c, "KHORDEH AVESTĀ (Pahlavi xwardag aβistāg) "The Little Avesta," the name given to a collection of texts used primarily by the laity for everyday devotions".

Malandra 2000c, "Thus, it excludes the high liturgy of the priestly ritual, namely, the Yasna, Visperad, and Vendidad".

Hintze 2014, "YAŠTS, the group of 21 Avestan hymns in praise of various deities of the Zoroastrian pantheon".

Hintze 2014, "The Yašts are transmitted in two types of manuscript: Khorde Avestas and pure Yašt codices".

Raffaelli 2000.

Kanga 2014.

Geldner 1889, pp. 268–277.

Malandra 2000b.

Kellens 1987, "The fragments. In addition to the complete texts, more than twenty groups of fragments are known".

Cantera 2004, p. 134: "da in diesem Kanon die Pahlavi Übersetzung enthalten war".

Cantera 2015a, "We know that the Sasanian great Avesta [included] a translation into Pahlavi, because its description in the Dēnkard is based on the PT and because the manuscripts of texts deriving directly from the great Avesta always included the PT".

Cantera 2015a, "We distinguish at least three chronological levels: (1) old translations like the Vīdēvdād, Nērangestān, and Hērbedestān".

Darmesteter 1880.

Darmesteter 1883.

Mills 1887.

Darmesteter 1892a.

Darmesteter 1892b.

Darmesteter 1893.

Kellens 1987, "Darmesteter, whose translation follows the Pahlavi version".

Wolff 1910.

Kellens 1987, "As a rule, Wolff is more reliable than Darmesteter".

Works cited

Bartholomae, Christian (1904). Altiranisches Wörterbuch. Straßburg: Karl J. Trübner.

Boyce, Mary (1984). Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism. Textual Sources for the Study of Religion. Manchester University Press. p. 176.

Cantera, Alberto (2004). Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta. Iranica. Vol. 7. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. p. 379. ISBN 9783447051231.

Cantera, Alberto (2012). "Preface". In Cantera, Alberto (ed.). The

transmission of the Avesta. *Iranica*. Vol. 20. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. ISBN 978-3-447-06554-2.

Cantera, Alberto (2013). "Die Manuskriptologie der Avesta-Handschriften". In Paul, L. (ed.). *Handbuch Iranistik*. Wiesbaden: Reichert.

Cantera, Alberto (2015a), "Avesta II: Middle Persian Translations", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, New York: Encyclopedia Iranica online

Cantera, Alberto (2015b). "Avestan manuscripts". *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction (PDF)*. Hamburg: COMSt (Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies). pp. 195–282. ISBN 978-3-7323-1768-4.

Cantera, Alberto (2020). "Litanies and rituals. The structure and position of the Long Liturgy within the Zoroastrian ritual system". *Aux sources des liturgies indo-iraniennes*. Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège. pp. 195–282. doi:10.4000/BOOKS.PULG.18521. ISBN 978-2-87562-260-0.

Cantera, Alberto (2022). "On the Edge between Literacy and Orality – Manuscripts and Performance of the Zoroastrian Long Liturgy". *Oral Tradition*. 35 (2).

Daniel, Elton L. (2012). *The History of Iran*. Greenwood. p. 352. ISBN 978-0313375095.

Darmesteter, James (1880). Müller, Max (ed.). *The Zend-Avesta Part I: The Vendidad. Sacred Books of the East*. Vol. 4. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Darmesteter, James (1883). Müller, Max (ed.). *The Zend-Avesta Part II: The Sirozahs, Yasts and Nyayis. Sacred Books of the East*. Vol. 23. Dehli: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Darmesteter, James (1892a). *Le Zend-Avesta: Traduction nouvelle avec commentaire historique et philologique; Vol I: La liturgie (Yasna et Vispered)*. Paris: E. Leroux.

Darmesteter, James (1892b). *Le Zend-Avesta: Traduction nouvelle avec commentaire historique et philologique; Vol. II: La Loi (Vendidad); L'Épopée (Yashts); Le Livre de Prière (Khorda Avesta)*. Paris: E. Leroux.

Darmesteter, James (1893). *Le Zend-Avesta: traduction nouvelle avec commentaire historique et philologique. Vol III: Origines de la littérature et*

de la religion zoroastriennes: appendice à la traduction de l'Avesta (fragments des Nasks perdus et index). Paris: E. Leroux.

Geldner, Karl F. (1886). Avesta. The Sacred Books of the Parsis I: Yasna. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Geldner, Karl F. (1889). Avesta. The Sacred Books of the Parsis II: Vispered and Khorda Avesta. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Geldner, Karl F. (1896). Avesta. The Sacred Books of the Parsis III: Vendidad. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.

Gholami, Saloumeh (2024). The Afterlife of Avestan Manuscripts: Colophons and Marginal notes (PDF). Reichert Verlag. p. 442. ISBN 9783752007541.

Grenet, Frantz (2015). "Zarathustra's Time and Homeland – Geographical Perspectives". In Stausberg, Michael; Vevaina, Yuhán S.-D.; Tessmann, Anna (eds.). The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. ISBN 9781118785539.

Hale, Mark (2004). "Avestan". In Roger D. Woodard (ed.). The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the World's Ancient Languages. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-56256-2.

Hintze, Almut (2012). "On Editing the Avesta" (PDF). In Cantera, Alberto (ed.). The Transmission of the Avesta. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz. ISBN 978-3-447-06554-2.

Hintze, Almut (2014), "YAŠTS", Encyclopædia Iranica, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul

Hintze, Almut (2015). "Zarathustra's Time and Homeland – Linguistic Perspectives". In Stausberg, Michael; Vevaina, Yuhán S.-D.; Tessmann, Anna (eds.). The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. ISBN 9781118785539.

Hoffmann, Karl (1958), "Altiranisch", Handbuch der Orientalistik, I 4,1, Leiden: Brill

Hoffmann, Karl (December 15, 1987). "AVESTAN LANGUAGE i–iii". Encyclopædia Iranica. Brill Academic Publishers.

Hoffmann, Karl (1989). Der Sasanidische Archetypus – Untersuchungen zu Schreibung und Lautgestalt des Avestischen (in German). Reichert Verlag. ISBN 9783882264708.

Humbach, Helmut (1991), The Gathas of Zarathushtra and the Other Old Avestan Texts, Part I, Heidelberg: Winter

Kanga, M. F. (2014). "ĀFRĪNAGĀN". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Kellens, Jean (1987), "Avesta", Encyclopædia Iranica, vol. 3, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 35–44

Kellens, Jean (1987a), "Characters of Ancient Mazdaism", History and Anthropology, vol. 3, Great Britain: Harwood Academic Publishers, pp. 239–262

Kellens, Jean (1998). "Considérations sur l'histoire de l'Avesta". Journal Asiatique. 286 (2): 451–519. doi:10.2143/JA.286.2.556497.

Kreyenbroek, Philip G. (2022). "Early Zoroastrianism and Orality". Oral Tradition among Religious Communities in the Iranian-Speaking World. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Malandra, William W. (2000a). "VISPERAD". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Malandra, William W. (2000b). "VENDĪDĀD i. Survey of the history and contents of the text". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Malandra, William W. (2000c). "KHORDEH AVESTĀ". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Malandra, William W. (2006). "Yasna". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mills, Lawrence H. (1887). Müller, Max (ed.). The Zend-Avesta Part III: The Yasna, Visparad, Afrinagan, Gahs, and Miscellaneous Fragments. Sacred Books of the East. Vol. 31. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Raffaelli, Enrico G. (2000). "SĪH-RŌZAG". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York:

Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Redard, Céline (2021). The Srōš Drōn – Yasna 3 to 8. A Critical Edition with Ritual Commentaries and Glossary. Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 2 South Asia. Vol. 32. ISBN 978-90-04-50047-1.

Schlerath, Bernfried (1987), "Andreas, Friedrich Carl: The Andreas Theory", Encyclopædia Iranica, vol. 2, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 29–30

Schmitt, Rüdiger (2002). "SPIEGEL, FRIEDRICH (VON)". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Schmitt, Rüdiger (2000). "Die Sprachen der altiranischen Periode". Die iranischen Sprachen in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden. ISBN 3895001503.

Shaki, Mansour (1993). "DĀD NASK". Encyclopædia Iranica. Vol. VI. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp. 546–549.

Shapira, Dan (1998). Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis – Zand (PhD thesis). Jerusalem.

Skjaervø, P. Oktor (2009). "Old Iranian". In Windfuhr, Gernot (ed.). The Iranian Languages. Routledge. ISBN 9780203641736.

Skjaervø, P. Oktor (2011). "Avestan Society". In Daryaee, Touraj (ed.). The Oxford Handbook of Iranian History. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0199390427.

Skjaervø, P. Oktor (2012). "The Zoroastrian Oral Tradition as Reflected in the Texts". In Cantera, Alberto (ed.). The Transmission of the Avesta. Iranica. Vol. 20. Harrassowitz. p. 552. ISBN 978-3-447-06554-2.

de Vaan, Michiel; Martínez García, Javier (2014). Introduction to Avestan (PDF). Brill. ISBN 978-90-04-25777-1.

**Vevaina, Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw (2013). "Avesta". The Encyclopedia of Ancient History. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
doi:10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah12023. ISBN 978-1-4051-7935-5.**

West, Edward William (1892). Müller, Friedrich Max (ed.). Pahlavi Texts IV: Contents of the Nasks. The Sacred Books of the East. Vol. 37. Oxford

university press.

Westergaard, Niels L. (1852). *Zendavesta: or The religious books of the Zoroastrians*. Copenhagen: Berling brothers.

Witzel, Michael (2000). "The Home of the Aryans" (PDF). In Hinze, A.; Tichy, E. (eds.). *Festschrift für Johanna Narten zum 70. Geburtstag*. J. H. Roell. pp. 283–338. doi:10.11588/xarep.00000114.

Wolff, Fritz (1910). *Avesta. Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen*. Übersetzt auf der Grundlage von Christian Bartholomæus Altiranischem Wörterbuch. Straßburg: K. J. Trübner.

External links

Look up *Avesta* in Wiktionary, the free dictionary.

Wikiquote has quotations related to *Avesta*.

English Wikisource has original text related to this article:

Avesta

avesta.org: translation by James Darmesteter and L. H. Mills forms part of the Sacred Books of the East series, but is now regarded as obsolete.

"Zend-Avesta" . Encyclopædia Britannica (11th ed.). 1911.

The British Library: Discovering Sacred Texts – Zoroastrianism Archived 2021-11-11 at the Wayback Machine

vte

Avesta

vte

Religious texts (List)

Authority control databases: National Edit this at Wikidata

FranceBnF dataPoland

Category: Avesta

This page was last edited on 25 November 2025, at 20:08 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Yasna

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Yasna

First two pages of the first chapter of the Yasna in Geldner's edition of the Avesta[1]

Information

Religion Zoroastrianism

Language Avestan

Chapters 72

Yasna (/ˈjʌsnə/;[2] Avestan: 𐬨𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬭𐬀) is the Avestan name of both a text within the Avesta collection and of the Yasna liturgy, Zoroastrianism's principal act of worship.[3]

Overview

The function of the yasna ceremony is, very roughly described, to strengthen the orderly spiritual and material creations of Ahura Mazda against the assault of the destructive forces of Angra Mainyu. The yasna service, that is, the recitation of the Yasna texts, culminates in the apæ zaothra, the "offering to the waters." The ceremony may also be extended by recitation of the Visperad and Vendidad texts. A normal yasna ceremony, without extensions, takes about two hours when it is recited by an experienced priest.

The Yasna texts constitute 72 chapters altogether, composed at different times and by different authors.[3] The middle chapters include the (linguistically) oldest texts of the Zoroastrian canon. These very ancient texts, in the very archaic and linguistically difficult Old Avestan language, include the four most sacred Zoroastrian prayers, and also 17 chapters consisting of the five Gathas, hymns that are considered to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. Several sections of the Yasna include exegetical comments. Yasna chapter and verse pointers are traditionally abbreviated with Y.

The Avestan language word yasna literally means 'oblation' or 'worship'. The word is linguistically and functionally related to Vedic Sanskrit yajna.

The liturgy

Main article: Yasna (liturgy)

The theological function of the Yasna liturgy, and the proper performance of it, is to further asha, that is, the ceremony aims to strengthen that which is right/true (one meaning of asha) in the existence/creation (another meaning of asha) of divine order (yet another meaning of asha). The Encyclopedia Iranica summarizes the aim of the yasna ceremony as "the maintenance of the cosmic integrity of the good creation of Ahura Mazdā." [4]

Zoroastrianism's cosmological/eschatological perception of the purpose of humankind is to strengthen the orderly spiritual and material creations of Mazda against the assault of the destructive forces of Angra Mainyu. In that conflict, theologically speaking, mankind's primary weapon is the yasna ceremony, which is understood to have a direct, immediate effect: "[f]ar from being a symbolic act, the proper performance of the yasna is what prevents the cosmos from falling into chaos." [4] The culminating act of the yasna ceremony is the Ab-Zohr, the "strengthening of the waters".

The Yasna service, that is, the recitation of the Yasna texts, culminates in the Ab-Zohr, the "offering to waters". The Yasna ceremony may be extended by

recitation of the Visperad and Vendidad.

A well-trained priest is able to recite the entire Yasna in about two hours.[5] With extensions, it takes about an hour longer. In its normal form, the Yasna ceremony is only to be performed in the morning.

The text

Structure and organization

The texts of the Yasna are organized into 72 chapters, known as hads or has (from Avestan ha'iti, 'cut'). The 72 threads of the Zoroastrian Kusti – the sacred girdle worn around the waist – represent the 72 chapters of the Yasna.

From a literary point of view, the 72 chapters consist of two nested inner cores, and an outer envelope. The outer chapters/sections (the "envelope") are in the Younger Avestan language. The middle 27 chapters include the (linguistically) oldest texts of the Zoroastrian canon. The inner chapters/sections (excepting chapters 42.1–4, 52.5–8) are in the more archaic Old Avestan language, with the four sacred formulae bracketing the innermost core. This innermost core includes the 17 chapters of the Gathas, the oldest and most sacred texts of the Zoroastrian canon.

Yasna 1–27.12

Yasna 27.13–27.15: three of the four of the most sacred Zoroastrian prayers

Yasna 28–34: Gatha 1

Yasna 35–41: the "seven-chapter Yasna"

Yasna 43–51, 53: Gathas 2–5 (chapters 43–46, 47–50, 51 and 53)

Yasna 54.1: fourth of four of the most sacred Zoroastrian prayers

Yasna 54.2–72

From a ritual point of view, the liturgy can be broken into 4 major sections, each having its own internal prelude:

Chapter 1–12: Invitation of the divinities to the worship

Chapter 13–59: The Staota Yesniia

Chapter 60–69: The culmination of the Yasna (the "Ab-Zohr"), accompanied by intense ritual activity.

Chapter 70–72: Conclusion and thanks to the divinities for attending

Some sections of the Yasna occur more than once. For instance, Yasna 5 is repeated as Yasna 37, and Yasna 63 consists of passages from Yasna 15.2, 66.2 and 38.3. The ability to recite the Yasna from memory is one of the prerequisites for Zoroastrian priesthood.

Content summaries

Yasna 1 opens with the praise of Ahura Mazda, enumerating his divine titles as the Creator, "radiant, glorious, the greatest, the best, the most beautiful, the most firm, the most wise, of the most perfect form, the highest in righteousness, possessed of great joy, creator, fashioner, nourisher, and the Most Holy Spirit." (Dhalla, 1936:155). Yasna 1 then enumerates the divinities, inviting them to the service.

Yasna 2, the Barsom Yasht, presents libation and the barsom (a bundle of 23 twigs bound together, symbolizing sanctity) to the invited divinities. Yasna 2–4 complement Yasna 1. Most verses in Yasna 2–3 begin with the formula ayese yeshti ..., "by means of this sacrifice, I call ...", followed by the name of the divinity being invoked.

Yasna 3–8 known collectively as the Sarosh dron, presents other offerings (zaothra). Yasna 3 draws the attention of the divinities invoked in Yasna 1, and in Yasna 4, the offerings are consecrated to the divinities. Yasna 5 is repeated in Yasna 37. Yasna 6 is almost identical to the first 10 verses of Yasna 17.

Yasna 9–11 is the Hom Yasht, a collection of accolades to the Haoma plant and its divinity.

Yasna 12 constitutes the Fravarane, the Zoroastrian creed and declaration of faith. It is in "Artificial" Gathic Avestan, that is, it is stylistically and linguistically aligned with the language of the Gathas, but imperfectly. The last strophe of verse 7 as well as all of verses 8 and 9 are incorporated into the Kusti ritual.

Yasna 13–18 are comparable to Yasna 1–8 in that they too are a collection of invocations to the divinities. Chapters 14–18 serve as an introduction to the Staota Yesniia of Yasna 19–59. The first 10 verses of Yasna 17, "to the fires, waters, plants", is almost identical to Yasna 6.

Yasna 19–21, the Bhagan Yasht, are commentaries on the three 'high prayers' of Yasna 28–53.

Yasna 22–26 is another set of invocations to the divinities.

Yasna 27 has the prayers referred to by Yasna 19–21. These are:

The Ahuna Vairya invocation (also known as the Yatha Ahu Vairyo), the most sacred of all Zoroastrian prayers.

The Ashem Vohu

The Yenghe hatam

Yasna 28.1, Ahunavaiti Gatha (Bodleian MS J2)

Yasna 28–53 include the (linguistically) oldest texts of the Zoroastrian canon. 17 of the 26 chapters make up the Gathas, the most sacred hymns of Zoroastrianism and thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. The Gathas are in verse. These are structurally interrupted by a) the Yasna Haptanghaiti ("seven-chapter Yasna", #35–41), which is as old as the Gathas but in prose, b) two short chapters (#42 and #52) that are not as old as the Gathas and Yasna Haptanghaiti.

Yasna 28–34: Ahunavaiti Gatha

Yasna 35–41: Yasna Haptanghaiti, the "seven-chapter Yasna", also in Gathic

Avestan but in prose.

Yasna 42: a 4 verse chapter invoking the elements.

Yasna 43–46: Ushtavait Gatha

Yasna 47–50: Spenta Mainyu Gatha

Yasna 51: Vohu Khshathra Gatha

Yasna 52: an 8 verse hymn to Ashi. Verses 52.5 – 52.8, in Younger Avestan, are a duplicate of Yasna 8.5 – 8.8.

Yasna 53: Vahishto Ishti Gatha

Yasna 54 has the text of the a airiema ishiio, a prayer referred to in Yasna 27.

Yasna 55 is a praise to the Gathas and the Staota Yesniia.

Yasna 56 is again an invocation to the divinities, appealing for their attention.

Yasna 57 is the Sarosh Yasht, the hymn to the divinity of religious discipline. It is closely related to, and appears to have sections borrowed from Yasht 10, the hymn to Mithra.

Yasna 58 is again a "hidden" Yasht, here to the genius of prayer (cf. Dahman).

Yasna 59 is a repetition of the sections from Yasna 17 and 26.

Yasna 60 is blessing upon the house of the ashavan ('just' or 'true' man). Yasna 60.2–7 constitute the Dahma Afriti invocation, also known as the Afrinagan Dahman.

Yasna 61 praises the anti-demonic powers imbued in the Afrinagan Dahman, Yenghe hatam and the three principal prayers of Yasna 27.

Yasna 62 constitutes the Ataksh Nyashes, prayers to fire and its divinity.

Yasna 63–69 constitute the prayers that accompany the Ab-Zohr, "offering to water".

Yasna 70–72 are again a set of invocations to the divinities.

Editions

Translations of the Yasna liturgy now in the public domain:

Mills, Lawrence Heyworth (1887), Avesta: Yasna, Sacred Books of the East, vol. 31, Oxford University Press.

at avesta.org (organized by chapter).

Mills, American Edition, 1898, with select passages adopted from

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1908), The Nyaishes Or Zoroastrian Litanies, Columbia University Press.

at sacred-texts.com (plain text).

References

Geldner 1885.

"Yasna". Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.

"YASNA - Encyclopedia Iranica". Encyclopædia Iranica. Retrieved 2023-07-19.

Malandra 2006.

Stausberg 2004, pp. 337, n131.

Bibliography

Boyce, Mary (1975), History of Zoroastrianism, vol. I, Leiden: Brill, ISBN 90-04-10474-7.

Boyce, Mary (1983), "Āb-Zōhr", Encyclopaedia Iranica, vol. 1, Costa Mesa: Mazda Pub.

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1938). History of Zoroastrianism . Oxford University Press – via Wikisource.

Drower, Elizabeth Stephens (1944), "The Role of Fire in Parsi Ritual", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 74 (1/2): 75–89, doi:10.2307/2844296, JSTOR 2844296

Geldner, Karl F. (1885). *Avesta: die heiligen Bücher der Parsen I: Prolegomena, Yasna*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. doi:10.25673/100265.

Kellens, Jean (1989), "Avesta", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, Costa Mesa: Mazda Pub, pp. 35–44.

Kotwal, Firoze M.; Boyd, James W. (1991), *The Yasna: A Zoroastrian High Liturgy*, *Cahiers de Studia Iranica*, vol. 8, Leuven: Peeters.

Malandra, William (2006), "Yasna", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. online edition, New York: iranicaonline.org.

Stausberg, Michael (2004), *Die Religion Zarathushtras (Band 3)*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, ISBN 3-17-017120-8.

External links

Wikisource has original text related to this article: Avesta/Yasna

vte

Zoroastrianism

vte

Avesta

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: AvestaAncient Iranian religionZoroastrian texts

This page was last edited on 22 November 2025, at 13:11 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of

[Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Visperad

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Visperad

First page of the Visperad in Geldner's edition[1]

Information

Religion Zoroastrianism

Language Avestan

Chapters 24[a] Kardes

The Visperad (wysplt')[2] is one of the texts in the Avesta collection.[3] Its 24 chapters do not have any internal unity, but are only used within the Yasht i Visperad liturgy, where they are individually inserted into the text of the Yasna.[4]

Name

The name of the text is based on Middle Persian wysplt',[2] itself derived from Avestan vispe ratavo.[b] It has been variously transliterated by scholars as Visperad,[5] Vispered,[6] Vispéred[7] or Wisperad.[8] The term itself has an ambiguous meaning. Subject to how ratu is translated,[c] vispe ratavo may be translated as "(prayer to) all patrons",[9] "all masters",[10] or, the older and today less common, "all chiefs." [11] or "all lords."

Text

The text of the Visperad has no unity of its own, and is never recited separately from the Yasna. During the Visperad liturgy, its sections are not recited en bloc but are instead interleaved into the text of the Yasna.[12] These supplementary sections (karda) are then – from a philological perspective – the passages that make up the Visperad. The standard abbreviation for Visperad chapter-verse pointers is Vr., though Vsp. may also appear in older sources.

The Visperad itself exalts several texts of the Yasna, including the Ahuna Vairya and the Airyaman ishya, the Gathas, and the Yasna Haptanghaiti (Visperad 13–16, 18–21, 23–24[13]) Unlike in a regular Yasna liturgy, the Yasna Haptanghaiti is recited a second time between the 4th and 5th Gatha (the

first time between the 1st and 2nd as in a standard Yasna).

Visperad liturgy

Main article: Yasht i Visperad

The text of the Visperad is used during the Visperad liturgy, also known in Middle Persian as Yasht i Visperad or Jesht-i Visperad.[14] This means it is a Yasna liturgy, known in Middle Persian as Yasht, which includes a worship of all the ratus. The Visperad liturgy has a strong connection to yearly Zoroastrian festivals known as Gahambars, and it may have been created as an "extended service" for that occasion.[14]

As seasonal festivals, the gahambars are dedicated to the Amesha Spentas, the divinities that are in tradition identified with specific aspects of creation, and through whom Ahura Mazda realized ("with his thought") creation. These "bounteous immortals" (amesha spentas) are the "all patrons" – the vispe ratavo – who apportion the bounty of creation. However, the Visperad liturgy itself is dedicated to Ahura Mazda, the ratūm berezem "high Master." [14]

Manuscripts

The manuscripts of the Visperad have come to us in two different traditions. [15] The first group is the liturgical manuscripts of the Vendidad, called Venidad Sadeh. Since the Vendidad liturgy is an extension of the Yasht i Visperad, these manuscripts contain the text of the Yasna, Visperad and Vendidad as they are performed in the Vendidad liturgy.[16] The second group comprises the exegetical manuscripts. They only contain the text unique to the Visperad plus a translation and commentary into Middle Persian. Since the written form of Middle Persian is called Pahlavi, this manuscript type is called Visperad Pahlavi.[15] They all descend from the K7 manuscript, held in the Copenhagen collection, written in 1287 by Rustam Mihirban Marzban.[17] A lengthy treatment of the different manuscripts is provided by Geldner[18] and Dhabhar.[19]

Editions

The Visperad has been edited as part of the wider Avesta collection. The most important critical editions were provided by Westergaard,[20] and Geldner.[21] In 1949, Herbed Dhabhar published an edition dedicated to the Pahlavi manuscripts of the Yasna and Visperad.[22] Despite its age, Geldner has remained the reference edition to this day.[23] One of the drawbacks of these old editions is that they do not present the text within its liturgical context. This has been addressed more recently by Kellens who published a multi-volume edition and translation of the Yasna and Visperad with a focus on their liturgical use.[24][25][26][27]

Translations

Translations of the Visperad are likewise being typically published as part of translations of the whole Avesta. A first translation into English was published in 1887 within the Sacred Books of the East series, edited by Max Müller. Volume 31 of the series was dedicated to the Visperad with a translation done by Mills.[28] In 1892 Darmesteter provided a translation of the Visperad into French, as part of his translation of the whole Avesta.[29] In 1910, Fritz Wolff produced a translation into German.[30]

References

Notes

a)^ The number of sections differs in the editions. Geldner divides it into 24,[21] whereas Mills for instance has 23.[31]

b)^ *vīspe ratavō*[32] in the Geldner/Bartholomae transliteration scheme, *vīspe ratauuō*[9] in the Hoffmann scheme.

c)^ the stem *rat-* is literally "to (ap)portion," (from base *ar-* "to get" and "to cause to get, give") with the matter being portioned ranging from time (*ratav*, a segment of time) to material goods (cf. Kellens'[9] *ratu* "patron") and justice (*ratu* then being a "judge," and *ratav* then being a judicial

ruling). For the various meanings of ratav, see Bartholomae 1904, cols. 1498-1504.

Citations

Geldner 1889, p. 3.

Kotwal & Kreyenbroek 2009, p. 124.

Malandra 2000, "VISPERAD: name of a lengthy Avestan text divided into 24 chapters".

Andrés-Toledo 2015, p. 520.

Malandra 2000.

Geldner 1889.

Darmesteter 1892.

Cantera 2013.

Kellens 1989, p. 38.

Boyce 2001, p. 125.

Mills 1887, p. 335,n.1.

Stausberg 2004, p. 336.

Stausberg 2002, p. 86.

Boyce 1993, p. 795.

Malandra 2000, "There are two general manuscript traditions of the Visperad".

Geldner 1885, p. xix: "The second class is composed of the Mss. of the so-called Vendidad sada in which the Yasna, Vispered and Vendidad are all combined, without the Pahlavi translation, into a single book for liturgical use".

Dhabhar 1949, p. 8: "All Pahlavi MSS. of the Visperad descend from the Copenhagen MS. K7. It contains " the oldest and best Vispered Sade with a

superscription of the copyist Rustam Mihirban Marzban [great grand uncle of Mihiravan Kaikhusru] and as date A.D. 1287".

Geldner 1885, Prologomena.

Dhabhar 1949, pp. 8-11.

Westergaard 1852.

Geldner 1889, pp. 1-31.

Dhabhar 1949.

Redard 2021, p. 1: "Geldner's edition, became the reference edition".

Kellens 2006.

Kellens 2007.

Kellens 2010.

Kellens 2011.

Mills 1887, pp. 333-364.

Darmesteter 1892, pp. 443-492.

Wolff 1910.

Mills 1887.

Bartholomae 1904, col. 1467, 1501.

Bibliography

**Andrés-Toledo, Miguel Á. (2015). "Primary Sources: Avestan and Pahlavi".
The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. Chichester: John Wiley &
Sons, Ltd. ISBN 978-1-4443-3135-6.**

**Bartholomae, Christian (1904), Altiranisches Wörterbuch, Strassburg:
Trübner (fasc., 1979, Berlin: de Gruyter)**

**Boyce, Mary (1993), "Iranian Festivals", in Fischer, W. B.; Gershevitch, Ilya;
Yarshster, Ehsan (eds.), Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 3, Cambridge: UP, pp.**

Boyce, Mary (2001), *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London: Routledge

Cantera, Alberto (2013). "Talking with god: The Zoroastrian ham.parshti or intercalation ceremonies". *Journal Asiatique*. 301 (1): 85–138. doi:10.2143/JA.301.1.2994461.

Darmesteter, James (1892). *Le Zend-Avesta: Traduction nouvelle avec commentaire historique et philologique; Vol I: La liturgie (Yasna et Vispéred)*. Paris: E. Leroux.

Dhabhar, E. B. N. (1949). *Pahlavi Yasna and Visperad*. Bombay: Trustees of the Parsi Punchayet Funds and Properties.

Geldner, Karl F. (1885). *Avesta: die heiligen Bücher der Parsen I: Prolegomena, Yasna*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. doi:10.25673/100265.

Geldner, Karl F. (1889). *Avesta: die heiligen Bücher der Parsen II: Vispered und Khorde Avesta*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer. doi:10.25673/100261.

Kellens, Jean (1987), "Avesta", *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 3, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 35–44

Kellens, Jean (2006). *Etudes avestiques et mazdéennes: Volume 1, Le Ratauu vispe mazista (Yasna 1.1 à 7.23, avec Visprad 1 et 2)*. Vol. 1. Editions De Boccard. ISBN 2-7018-0191-5.

Kellens, Jean (2007). *Etudes avestiques et mazdéennes: Volume 2, Le Hom Stom et la zone des déclarations (Y7.24 – Y15.4, avec les intercalations de Vr3 à 6)*. Vol. 2. Editions De Boccard. ISBN 978-2-7018-0224-4.

Kellens, Jean (2010). *Etudes avestiques et mazdéennes: Volume 3, Le long préambule du sacrifice (Yasna 16 à 27.12, avec les intercalations de Visprad 7 à 12)*. Vol. 3. Editions De Boccard. ISBN 978-2701802725.

Kellens, Jean (2011). *Etudes avestiques et mazdéennes.: Volume 4, L'acmé du sacrifice : les parties récentes des Staota Yesniia (Y 27.13-Y 59) avec les intercalations de Visprad 13 à 24 et la Dahma Afriti (Y 60-61)*. Vol. 4. Editions De Boccard. ISBN 978-2701803074.

Kotwal, Firoze M.; Kreyenbroek, Philip G. (2009). The Herbedestan and Nerangestan. Studia Iranica. Vol. IV: Nerangestan, Fragard 3. Paris: Association pour l'avancement des études iraniennes (AAEI).

Malandra, William W. (2000). "VISPERAD". Encyclopædia Iranica. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mills, Lawrence H. (1887). Müller, Max (ed.). The Zend-Avesta Part III: The Yasna, Visparad, Afrinagan, Gahs, and Miscellaneous Fragments. Sacred Books of the East. Vol. 31. Oxford: Claredon Press.

Redard, Céline (2021). The Srōš Drōn - Yasna 3 to 8. A Critical Edition with Ritual Commentaries and Glossary. Handbook of Oriental Studies. Section 2 South Asia. Vol. 32. ISBN 978-90-04-50047-1.

Stausberg, Michael (2002), Die Religion Zarathushtras, vol. 1, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag

Stausberg, Michael (2004), Die Religion Zarathushtras, vol. 3, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag

Westergaard, Niels L. (1852). Zendavesta: or The religious books of the Zoroastrians. Copenhagen: Berling brothers.

Wolff, Fritz (1910). Avesta. Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen. Übersetzt auf der Grundlage von Christian Bartholomae's Altiranischem Wörterbuch. Straßburg: K. J. Trübner.

External links

English Wikisource has original text related to this article:

Avesta

Avestan text of the Visperad at Avesta.org based on the edition by Geldner

English translation of the Visperad at Avesta.org based on the translation by Mills

vte

Avesta

vte

Zoroastrianism

Category: Avesta

This page was last edited on 9 November 2025, at 14:51 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Denkard

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article should specify the language of its non-English content using {{lang}} or {{langx}}, {{transliteration}} for transliterated languages, and {{IPA}} for phonetic transcriptions, with an appropriate ISO 639 code. Wikipedia's multilingual support templates may also be used. See why.
(October 2021)

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

icon Religion portal

vte

The Dēnkard or Dēnkart (Middle Persian: 𐭌𐭕𐭅𐭕𐭕𐭕 "Acts of Religion") is a 10th-century compendium of Zoroastrian beliefs and customs during the time. The Denkard has been called an "Encyclopedia of Mazdaism"[1] and is a valuable source of Zoroastrian literature especially during its Middle Persian iteration. The Denkard is not considered a sacred text by a majority of Zoroastrians, but is still considered worthy of study.

Name

The name traditionally given to the compendium reflects a phrase from the colophons, which speaks of the kart/kard, from Avestan karda meaning "acts" (also in the sense of "chapters"), and dēn, from Avestan daena, literally "insight" or "revelation", but more commonly translated as "religion." Accordingly, dēn-kart means "religious acts" or "acts of religion." The ambiguity of -kart or -kard in the title reflects the orthography of Pahlavi writing, in which the letter ⟨t⟩ may sometimes denote /d/.

Date and authorship

The individual chapters vary in age, style and authorship. Authorship of the first three books is attributed by the colophons to 9th-century priest Adurfarnbag-i Farrokhzadan, as identified in the last chapter of book 3. Of these three books, only a larger portion of the third has survived. The historian Jean de Menasce proposes[citation needed] that this survival was the result of transmission through other persons.[according to whom?] The first three books were edited and in fact partially reconstructed,[2] circa 1020, by a certain Ādurbād Ēmēdān of Baghdad,[2] who is also the author of the remaining six books.[citation needed] The manuscript 'B' (ms. 'B 55', B for Bombay) that is the basis for most surviving copies and translations is dated 1659. Only fragments survive of any other copies.

The Denkard is roughly contemporary with the main texts of the Bundahishn.

Structure and content

The Denkard originally contained nine books or volumes, called nasks, and the first two and part of the third have not survived. However, the Denkard itself contains summaries of nasks from other compilations, such as Chihرداد from the Avesta, which are otherwise lost.

The natural divisions of the books are as follows: Books 3-5 are devoted to rational apologetics, book 4 to moral wisdom, and books 7–9 to exegetical theology.[2]

Book 3

Book 3, with 420 chapters, represents almost half of the surviving texts. Jean de Menasce observes[citation needed] that there must have been several different authors at work, as the style and language of the collection is not uniform. The authors are however united in their polemic against the "bad religions", which they do not fail to identify by name (the prudent avoidance of any mention of Islam being an exception).

The majority of the chapters in book 3 are short, of two or three pages apiece. The topics covered in detail, though rare, frequently also identify issues for which the Zoroastrians of the period were severely criticized, such as marriage to next-of-kin (chapter 80). Although on first sight there appears to be no systematic organization of the texts in book 3, the chapter that deals with the principles of Zoroastrian cosmogony (Ch. 123) is the central theme around which the other chapters are topically arranged.[citation needed]

The last chapter of book 3 mentions two legends: one in which Alexander destroys a copy of the Avesta, and another in which the Greeks translate the Avesta into their own language.[2]

Book 4

Book 4, the shortest (and most haphazardly organized) volume in the collection, deals primarily with the arts and sciences. Texts on those topics are interspersed by chapters explaining philosophical and theological concepts such as that of the Amesha Spentas, while other chapters deal with history and the religious contributions of Achaemenid and Sassanid monarchs.

Book 4 also contains an enumeration of works from Greece and India, and "reveals foreign influence from the 3rd century onward." [2] The last chapter of Book 4 ends with a chapter explaining the necessity for practicing good thoughts, words and deeds, and the influences these have on one's afterlife.

Book 5

Book 5 deals specifically with queries from adherents of other faiths.

The first half of Book 5, titled the "Book of Daylamite", is addressed to a Muslim, Yaqub bin Khaled, who apparently requested information on Zoroastrianism. A large part of this section is summary of the history (from the Zoroastrian point of view) of the world up to the advent of Zoroaster and the impact of his revelations. The history is then followed by a summary of the tenets of the faith. According to Philippe Gignoux, the section "clearly nationalist and Persian in orientation, expressing the hope of a Mazdean restoration in the face of Islam and its Arab supporters." [2]

The second half of Book 5 is a series of 33 responses to questions posed by a certain Bōxt-Mārā, a Christian. Thirteen responses address objections raised by Boxt-Mara on issues of ritual purity. The bulk of the remaining material deals with free will and the efficacy of good thoughts, words and deeds as a means to battle evil.

Book 6

Book 6 is a compilation of andarz (a literary genre, lit: "advice", "counsel"), anecdotes and aphorisms that embody a general truth or astute observation. Most of the compositions in book 6 are short didactic sentences that deal with morality and personal ethics.

Structurally, the book is divided into sections that are distinguished from one another by their introductory formulae. In the thematic divisions identified by Shaul Shaked,[3] the first part is devoted to religious subjects, with a stress on devotion and piety. The second and third are related to ethical principles, with the third possibly revealing Aristotelian values. The fourth part may be roughly divided into sections with each addressing a particular human quality or activity. The fifth part includes a summary of twenty-five functions or conditions of human life, organized in five categories: destiny, action, custom, substance and inheritance. The fifth part also includes an enumeration of the names of authors that may have once been the last part of the book. In its extant form the book has a sixth part that, like the first part, addresses religious subjects.

Book 7

Book 7 deals the "legend of Zoroaster", but which extends beyond the life of the prophet. The legend of Zoroaster as it appears in the Denkard is differs slightly from similar legends (such as those presented in the contemporaneous Selections of Zadspram and the later Zardosht-nama) in that it presents the story of the prophet as an analogy of the Yasna ceremony.

The thematic and structural divisions[1]:64 are as follows:

The span of human history beginning with Kayomars, in Zoroastrian

tradition identified as the first king and the first man, and ending with the Kayanid dynasty. This section of book 7 is essentially the same as that summarized in the first part of book 5, but additionally presents Zoroaster as the manifest representation of khwarrah (Avestan: kavaēm kharēno, "[divine] [royal] glory") that has accumulated during that time.

Zoroaster's parents and his conception.

Zoroaster's infancy and the vain attempts to kill him, through to Zoroaster's first communication with Ohrmuzd and the meeting with Good Thought, the Amesha Spenta Bahman (Avestan: Vohu Manah).

Zoroaster's revelation as received during his seven conversations with Ohrmuzd; the subsequent miracles against the daevas; the revival of the horse of Vishtasp (Avestan: Vistaspa) and the king's subsequent conversion; the vision of Zoroaster.

The life of Zoroaster from Vistasp's conversion up to Zoroaster's death, including his revelations on science and medicine.

The miracles that followed Zoroaster's death

The history of Persia until the Islamic conquest, with an emphasis on several historical or legendary figures.

Prophecies and predictions up to the end of the millennium of Zoroaster (that ends one thousand years after his birth), including the coming of the first savior and his son Ushetar.

The miracles of the thousand years of Ushetar until the coming of Ushetarmah.

The miracles of the thousand years of Ushetarmah until the coming of the Saoshyant.

The miracles of the fifty-seven years of the Saoshyant until the frashgird, the final renovation of the world.

Book 8

Book 8 is a commentary on the various texts of the Avesta, or rather, on the Sassanid archetype of the Avesta. Book 8 is of particular interest to scholars

of Zoroastrianism because portions of the canon have been lost and the Denkard at least makes it possible to determine which portions are missing and what those portions might have contained. The Denkard also includes an enumeration of the divisions of the Avesta, and which once served as the basis for a speculation that only one quarter of the texts had survived. In the 20th century it was determined that the Denkard's divisions also took Sassanid-era translations and commentaries into account; these were however not considered to be a part of the Avesta.

Book 9

Book 9 is a commentary on the Gathic prayers of Yasna 27 and Yasna 54. Together, these make up Zoroastrianism's four most sacred invocations: the ahuna vairya (Y 27.13), the Ashem Vohu (Y 27.14), the yenghe hatam (Y 27.15) and the airyaman ishya (Y 54.1).

Bibliography

Jean de Menasce (1958). *Une encyclopédie mazdéenne: le Dēnkart*. Quatre conférences données à l'Université de Paris sous les auspices de la fondation Ratanbai Katrak. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Philippe Gignoux (1996). "Dēnkard". *Encyclopedia Iranica*. Vol. 7. Costa Mesa: Mazda Pub.

Shaked, Shaul (1995). *From Zoroastrian Iran to Islam: Studies in Religious History and Intercultural Contacts 1*. Brookfield: Ashgate.

Further reading

Wikisource has the text of the 1905 New International Encyclopedia article "Dinkard".

The Dēnkard in English

Kassock, Zeke, (2012), *Facsimile Of The Complete Text Of The Pahlavi Dinkard: Volume I: Books III - V*, ISBN 978-1469927565

vte

Persian literature

vte

Zoroastrianism

vte

Zoroastrian literature

Category: Zoroastrian texts

This page was last edited on 13 February 2025, at 03:13 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Bundahishn

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

icon Religion portal

vte

The Bundahishn (Middle Persian: Bun-dahišn(īh), "Primal Creation") is an

encyclopedic collection of beliefs about Zoroastrian cosmology written in the Book Pahlavi script.[1] The original name of the work is not known. It is one of the most important extant witnesses to Zoroastrian literature in the Middle Persian language. Most of the chapters of the compendium date to the 8th and 9th centuries CE.

Although the Bundahishn draws on the Avesta and develops ideas alluded to in those texts, it is not itself scripture. The content reflects Zoroastrian scripture, which, in turn, reflects both ancient Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian beliefs. In some cases, the text alludes to contingencies of post-7th century Islam in Iran, and in yet other cases, such as the idea that the Moon is farther than the stars.

Structure

The Bundahishn survives in two recensions: an Indian and an Iranian version. The shorter version was found in India and contains only 30 chapters, and is thus known as the Lesser Bundahishn, or Indian Bundahishn. A copy of this version was brought to Europe by Abraham Anquetil-Duperron in 1762. A longer version was brought to India from Iran by T.D. Anklesaria around 1870, and is thus known as the Greater Bundahishn or Iranian Bundahishn or just Bundahishn. The greater recension (the name of which is abbreviated GBd or just Bd) is about twice as long as the lesser (abbreviated IBd). It contains 36 chapters. The Bundahishn contains characteristics that fall under the rubric of different forms of classifications, including both as an encyclopedic text and as a text similar to midrash.[2]

The traditionally given name seems to be an adoption of the sixth word from the first sentence of the younger of the two recensions.[3] The older of the two recensions has a different first line, and the first translation of that version adopted the name Zand-Āgāhīh, meaning "Zand-knowing", from the first two words of its first sentence.

Most of the chapters of the compendium date to the 8th and 9th centuries, roughly contemporary with the oldest portions of the Denkard, which is another significant text of the "Pahlavi" (i.e. Zoroastrian Middle Persian) collection. The later chapters are several centuries younger than the oldest ones. The oldest existing copy dates to the mid-16th century.

The two recensions derive from different manuscript traditions, and in the portions available in both sources, vary (slightly) in content. The greater recension is also the older of the two, and was dated by West to around 1540. The lesser recension dates from about 1734.

Traditionally, chapter-verse pointers are in Arabic numerals for the lesser recension, and Roman numerals for the greater recension. The two series' are not synchronous since the lesser recension was analyzed (by Duperron in 1771) before the extent of the greater recension was known. The chapter order is also different.

Content

Regions depicted in chap. VIII (11) "On the nature of the lands": the Kvanîras (or Khvanîras), Savah, Arzah, Fradadafsh and Vîdadafsh, and Vôrûbarst and Vôrûgarst regions

The Bundahishn is the concise view of the Zoroastrianism's creation myth, and of the first battles of the forces of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu for the hegemony of the world. According to the text, in the first 3,000 years of the cosmic year, Ahura Mazda created the Fravashis and conceived the idea of his would-be creation. He used the insensible and motionless Void as a weapon against Angra Mainyu, and at the end of that period, Angra Mainyu was forced to submission and fell into a stupor for the next 3,000 years. Taking advantage of Angra Mainyu's absence, Ahura Mazda created the Amesha Spentas (Bounteous Immortals), representing the primordial elements of the material world, and permeated his kingdom with Ard (Asha), "Truth" in order to prevent Angra Mainyu from destroying it. The

Bundahishn finally recounts the creation of the primordial bovine, Ewagdad (Avestan Gavaevodata), and Keyumars (Avestan Keyumaretan), the primordial human.

Following MacKenzie,[3] the following chapter names in quotation marks reflect the original titles. Those without quotation marks are summaries of chapters that have no title. The chapter/section numbering scheme is based on that of B.T. Anklesaria[4] for the greater recension, and that of West[5] for the lesser recension. The chapter numbers for the greater recension are in the first column and in Roman numerals, and the chapter numbers for the lesser recension are in the second column, and are noted in Arabic numerals and in parentheses.

- I. (1) The primal creation of Ohrmazd and the onslaught of the Evil Spirit.**
- I A. n/a "On the material creation of the creatures."**
- II. (2) "On the fashioning forth of the lights."**
- III. n/a "On the reason for the creation of the creatures, for doing battle."**
- IV. (3) "On the running of the Adversary against the creatures."**
- IV A. (4) The death of the Sole-created Bovine.**
- V. (5) "On the opposition of the two Spirits."**
- V A. n/a "On the horoscope of the world, how it happened."**
- V B. n/a The planets.**
- VI. n/a "On the doing battle of the creations of the world against the Evil Spirit."**
- VI A. (6) "The first battle the Spirit of the Sky did with the Evil Spirit."**
- VI B (7) "The second battle the Water did."**

- VI C. (8) "The third battle the Earth did."
- VI D. (9) "The fourth battle the Plant did."
- VI E. (10) "The fifth battle the Sole-created Ox did."
- VI F. n/a "The sixth battle Keyumars did."
- VI G. n/a "The seventh battle the Fire did."
- VI H. n/a "The 8th battle the fixed stars did."
- VI I. n/a "The 9th battle the spiritual gods did with the Evil Spirit."
- VI J. n/a "The 10th battle the stars unaffected by the Mixing did."
- VII. n/a "On the form of those creations."
- VIII. (11) "On the nature of the lands."
- IX. (12) "On the nature of the mountains."
- X. (13) "On the nature of the seas."
- XI. (20) "On the nature of the rivers."
- XI A. (20) "On particular rivers."
- XI B. (21) The seventeen kinds of "water" (of liquid).
- XI C. (21) The dissatisfaction of the Arang, Marv, and Helmand rivers.
- XII. (22) "On the nature of the lakes."
- XIII. (14) "On the nature of the 5 kinds of animal."
- XIV. (15) "On the nature of men."
- XIV A. n/a "On the nature of women."
- XIV B. (23) On negroes.
- XV. (16) "On the nature of births of all kinds."
- XV A. (16) Other kinds of reproduction.

XVI. (27) "On the nature of plants."

XVI A. (27) On flowers.

XVII. (24) "On the chieftains of men and animals and every single thing."

XVII A. n/a On the inequality of beings.

XVIII.(17) "On the nature of fire."

XIX. n/a "On the nature of sleep."

XIX A. n/a The independence of earth, water, and plants from effort and rest.

XX. n/a On sounds.

XXI. n/a "On the nature of wind, cloud, and rain."

XXII. n/a "On the nature of the noxious creatures."

XXIII.n/a "On the nature of the species of wolf."

XXIV. (18-19) "On various things, in what manner they were created and the opposition which befell them."

XXIV. A-C. (18) The Gōkarn tree, the Wās ī Pañčāsadwarān (fish), the Tree of many seeds.

XXIV. D-U. (19) The three-legged ass, the ox Haḍayāš, the bird Čamroš, the bird Karšift, the bird Ašōzušt, the utility of other beasts and birds, the white falcon, the Kāskēn bird, the vulture, dogs, the fox, the weasel, the rat, the hedgehog, the beaver, the eagle, the Caspian horse, the cock.

XXV. (25) "On the religious year."

XXVI.n/a "On the great activity of the spiritual gods."

XXVII. (28) "On the evil-doing of Ahreman and the demons."

XXVIII. n/a "On the body of men as the measure of the world (microcosm)."

XXIX.(29) "On the chieftainship of the continents."

- XXX. n/a "On the Činwad bridge and the souls of the departed."
- XXXI. n/a "On particular lands of Ērānšahr, the abode of the Kays."
- XXXII. n/a "On the abodes which the Kays made with splendor, which are called wonders and marvels."
- XXXIII. n/a "On the afflictions which befell Ērānšahr in each millennium."
- XXXIV. (30) "On the resurrection of the dead and the Final Body."
- XXXV. (31-32) "On the stock and the offspring of the Kays."
- XXXV A. (33) "The family of the Mobads."
- XXXVI. (34) "On the years of the heroes in the time of 12,000 years."

Zoroastrian astronomy

Excerpt from Chapter 2:- On the formation of the luminaries.

1. Ohrmazd produced illumination between the sky and the earth, the constellation stars and those also not of the constellations, then the moon, and afterwards the sun, as I shall relate.

2. First he produced the celestial sphere, and the constellation stars are assigned to it by him; especially these twelve whose names are Varak (the Lamb), Tora (the Bull), Do-patkar (the Two-figures or Gemini), Kalachang (the Crab), Sher (the Lion), Khushak (Virgo), Tarazhuk (the Balance), Gazdum (the Scorpion), Nimasp (the Centaur or Sagittarius), Vahik (Capricorn), Dul (the Water-pot), and Mahik (the Fish);

3. which, from their original creation, were divided into the twenty-eight subdivisions of the astronomers, of which the names are Padevar, Pesh-Parviz, Parviz, Paha, Avesar, Beshn, Rakhvad, Taraha, Avra, Nahn, Miyan, Avdem, Mashaha, Spur, Husru, Srob, Nur, Gel, Garafsha Varant, Gau, Goi,

Muru, Bunda, Kahtsar, Vaht, Miyan, Kaht.

4. And all his original creations, residing in the world, are committed to them; so that when the destroyer arrives they overcome the adversary and their own persecution, and the creatures are saved from those adversities.

5. As a specimen of a warlike army, which is destined for battle, they have ordained every single constellation of those 6480 thousand small stars as assistance; and among those constellations four chieftains, appointed on the four sides, are leaders.

6. On the recommendation of those chieftains the many unnumbered stars are specially assigned to the various quarters and various places, as the united strength and appointed power of those constellations.

7. As it is said that Tishtar is the chieftain of the east, Sataves the chieftain of the west, Vanand the chieftain of the south, and Haptoring the chieftain of the north.

Translations

Domenico Agostini & Samuel Thrope (ed, trans), The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation, Oxford University Press 2020

Malandra, William W. (2024). The Bundahišn, Translated with Commentary by William W. Malandra. Washington DC: The Institute for the Study of Man, Inc. ISBN 978-0998366937.

See also

Dove Book, a medieval Russian poem sharing striking similarities with the Bundahishn

References

M. Hale, Pahlavi, in "The Ancient Languages of Asia and the Americas", Published by Cambridge University Press, 2008, ISBN 0-521-68494-3, p. 123.

Domenico Agostini and Samuel Thrope. "What is the Bundahišn?: Genre and Zoroastrian Literature." *Iran and the Caucasus* 2020, 378-393.

MacKenzie, David Neil (1990), "Bundahišn", *Encyclopedia Iranica*, vol. 4, Costa Mesa: Mazda, pp. 547–551.

Anklesaria, Behramgore Tehmuras, trans., ed. (1956), *Zand-Ākāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahišn. Transliteration and Translation in English*, Bombay {{citation}}: |first= has generic name (help).

West, Edward William, trans. ed. (1897), Max Müller (ed.), *The Bundahishn, Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 5, Oxford: OUP {{citation}}: |first= has generic name (help).

Further reading

Agostini, Domenico; Thrope, Samuel (2020). "What is the Bundahišn?: Genre and Zoroastrian Literature". *Iran and the Caucasus*. 24 (4): 378–393. doi:10.1163/1573384X-20200404. S2CID 230615227.

Agostini, D.; Thrope, S.; Shaked, S.; Strousma, G. (2020). *The Bundahišn: The Zoroastrian Book of Creation*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0190879044.

Boyce, Mary (1968), *Middle Persian Literature*, *Handbuch der Orientalistik* 1., Abt., IV. Band, 2. Abschn. 1, Leiden: Brill, pp. 40–41.

Kassock, Zeke J.V., (2013), *The Greater Iranian Bundahishn: A Pahlavi Student's 2013 Guide*, ISBN 978-1481013994

Malandra, William W. (2024). *The Bundahišn, Translated with Commentary by William W. Malandra*. Washington DC: The Institute for the Study of Man, Inc. ISBN 978-0998366937.

A translation of the Iranian or Greater Bundahišn by Anklesaria, Behramgore Tehmuras (1956) at Avesta.org

A modern transcription of the Indian Bundahishn in the original Pahlavi at TITUS

An edition of the Indian Bundahishn in the original Pahlavi, with German translation, by Ferdinand Justi (1868) at the Internet Archive

An edition of the Pahlavi text from 1908, edited by Ervad Tahmuras Dinshaji Anklesaria

External links

The Bundahishn (HTML format)

vte

Zoroastrian literature

vte

Zoroastrianism

Categories: Middle Persian literatureZoroastrian textsPersian encyclopedias

This page was last edited on 13 September 2025, at 23:38 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Pinchas Giller

Article

Talk

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Look for Pinchas Giller on one of Wikipedia's sister projects:

Wiktionary (dictionary)

Wikibooks (textbooks)

Wikiquote (quotations)

Wikisource (library)

Wikiversity (learning resources)

Commons (media)

Wikivoyage (travel guide)

Wikinews (news source)

Wikidata (linked database)

Wikispecies (species directory)

Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name. Please search for Pinchas Giller in Wikipedia to check for alternative titles or spellings.

You need to log in or create an account and be autoconfirmed to create new articles. Alternatively, you can use the article wizard to submit a draft for review, or request a new article.

Search for "Pinchas Giller" in existing articles.

Look for pages within Wikipedia that link to this title.

Other reasons this message may be displayed:

If a page was recently created here, it may not be visible yet because of a delay in updating the database; wait a few minutes or try the purge function.

Titles on Wikipedia are case sensitive except for the first character; please check alternative capitalizations and consider adding a redirect here to the correct title.

If the page has been deleted, check the deletion log, and see Why was the page I created deleted?

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Sefer Raziel HaMalakh

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Page 44b in the 1701 edition of **Sefer Raziel HaMalakh**, featuring various magical sigils (or סגולות, *seguloth*, in Hebrew).

Sefer Raziel HaMalakh (Hebrew: ספר רזיאל המלאך, "the book of Raziel the angel") is a grimoire of Practical Kabbalah from the Middle Ages written

primarily in Hebrew and Aramaic. The version of the book published in 1701 is the most known version. *Liber Razielis Archangeli*, its 13th-century Latin translation produced under Alfonso X of Castile, also survives.

Textual history

Like other obscure ancient texts such as the *Bahir* and *Sefer Yetzirah*, *Sefer HaRaziel* has been extant in a number of versions. The book cannot be shown to predate the 13th century, but may in parts date back to late antiquity insofar as its title is mentioned in another magical work of late antiquity: *The Sword of Moses*.

The book claims to have been revealed to Adam by the angel Raziel. Critical historians regard it as a medieval work, most probably originating among the Ashkenazi Hasidim, as citations reliant on the main body content of the work as we receive it begin to appear only in the 12th century. At least one section was available to Ibn Ezra before 1153, when he finished his commentary to Exodus.[1] The likely compiler of the medieval version is Eleazar of Worms, as *Sefer Galei Razia*, which developed into what we have now as *Sefer Raziel*, including more writings written by people of various theological opinions.[2] According to Jacob Emden, it was compiled by Abraham Abulafia.

Contents

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

Sefer Raziel HaMalakh draws heavily on Sefer Yetzirah and Sefer HaRazim "Book of Secrets". There are multiple manuscript versions, containing up to seven tractates. The printed version of Sefer Raziel is divided into five books, some of it in the form of a mystical midrash on Creation. It features an elaborate angelology, magical uses of the zodiac, gematria, names of God, protective spells, and a method of writing magical healing amulets.

Book six of the Liber Razielis, the latin version of the book, is based on Sefer haRazim, with various additions, including the "Prayer of Adam" of Sefer Adam.

The book became notorious in German Renaissance magic, named together with Picatrix as among the most abominable works of necromancy by Johannes Hartlieb. The prayer of Adam is paraphrased by Nicholas of Cusa in two sermons (Sermo I, 4, 16.25; Sermo XX, 8, 10-13) and further made use of by Johann Reuchlin in his De Arte Cabalistica.[3] Konrad Bollstatter in the 15th century also shows awareness of the Latin version of the "Prayer of Adam" an interpolation in Cgm 252, although he replaces Raziel with Raphael and Seth with Sem.[4]

Tree of Knowledge

Adam, in his prayer to God, apologized for listening to his wife Eve, who was deceived by the snake into eating from the Tree of Knowledge. According to the Book of Raziel, God sent the highest of the angels, Raziel, to teach Adam the spiritual laws of nature and life on Earth, including the knowledge of the planets, stars and the spiritual laws of creation.

The angel Raziel also taught Adam the knowledge of the power of speech, the power of thoughts and the power of a person's soul within the confines of the physical body and this physical world, basically teaching the knowledge with which one can harmonize physical and spiritual existence in this physical world.

The angel Raziel teaches the power of speech, the energy contained within the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, their combinations and meanings of names.

Adam and Abraham

According to Jewish traditions, the angel Raziel was sent to Earth to teach Adam as he prayed for guidance after the fall, and then returned to teach Abraham spiritual knowledge and laws because he had an elevated soul. The Book of Raziel explains everything from astrology to how the creative life energy starts with a thought from the spiritual realms, prior to manifestation as speech and action in this physical world. The eternal divine creative life energy of this earth is love, the book explains the spiritual laws of birth, death, reincarnation of the soul, and many spiritual laws of "change".

Heptameron

The Heptameron, ascribed to Petrus de Apono, is based on the Book of Raziel.[5]

Editions

רזיאל המלאך. Amsterdam (1701) Chabad-Lubavitch Library. Full-text PDF version, in Hebrew, from HebrewBooks.org

Steve Savedow (trans.), Sepher Rezial Hemelach: The Book of the Angel Rezial, Red Wheel/Weiser (2000), ISBN 978-1-57863-193-3.

The Book of the Angel Raziel. Volume I / Transl. from Hebrew and Aramaic and comm. by E. V. Kuzmin; editorship and foreword by B. K. Dvinyaninov. — St. Petersburg: Academy Of Culture's Research, 2020. — 264 pp.: illustrated, — (Code Grimoire Series). ISBN 978-5-6045100-3-2 (на русском языке)

The Book of the Angel Raziel. Volume II / Transl. from Hebrew and Aramaic, afterword and comm. by E. V. Kuzmin; editorship and foreword by B. K. Dvinyaninov. — St. Petersburg: Academy Of Culture's Research, 2021. — 512 pp.: illustrated, — (Code Grimoire Series). ISBN 978-5-6045100-4-9 (на русском языке)

See also

Hebrew astronomy

Jewish astrology

Jewish views on astrology

Primary texts of Kabbalah

Semiphoras and Schemhamphorash

Bahir

Sefer HaRazim

References

See Abraham Ibn Ezra on Exodus 14:19

admin (2019-01-29). "On the Origins and Authenticity of Zohar". The Rational Believer. Retrieved 2023-07-18.

Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, Reuchlin-Tagung Pforzheim 2001

Cgm 252, f. 142r-144r; Encyclopaedia Judaica 1, 777

**"Peter of Abano: Heptameron, or Magical Elements".
www.esotericarchives.com.**

Further reading

Avilés, A.G., Alfonso X y el Liber Razielis: imágenes de la magia astral judía en el scriptorium alfonsí, Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, Volume 74, Number 1, 1 January 1997, pp. 21–39

External links

The Original ספר "Sefer" Book of Raziel ספר רזיאל המלאך The Amsterdam Edition of Sefer Raziel "Book of Raziel" ספר רזיאל המלאך

The english translation of the book on Internet Archives

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: Kabbalah textsAstrological textsJewish grimoiresAdam and Eve

This page was last edited on 22 November 2025, at 10:44 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Article

Read

View history

Page semi-protected

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article needs more complete citations for verification. Please help add missing citation information so that sources are clearly identifiable. (April 2024) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

ᠮᠣᠩᠭᠤᠯᠠᠳ

Faravahar, one of the most prominent symbols of Zoroastrianism, on the Fire Temple of Yazd, Iran

Type Ethnic religion

Classification **Iranian**

Scripture Avesta

Theology **Monotheistic/Dualistic[1][2]**

Region **Greater Iran (historically)**

Language **Avestan**

Founder **Zoroaster (traditional)**

Origin **c. mid-6th century BCE**

Iranian Plateau

Separated from **Proto-Indo-Iranian religion**

Separations

ZurvanismMazdakism

Number of followers **110,000–120,000 (Zoroastrians)**

<?>

This article contains uncommon Unicode characters. Without proper rendering support, you may see question marks, boxes, or other symbols instead of the intended characters.

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

icon Religion portal

vte

Zoroastrianism,[a] also called Mazdayasna[b] or Behdin,[c] is an Iranian religion centred on the Avesta and the teachings of Zarathushtra Spitama, who is more commonly referred to by the Greek translation, Zoroaster (Greek: Ζωροάστρις Zōroastris). Among the world's oldest organized faiths, its adherents exalt an uncreated, benevolent, and all-wise deity known as Ahura Mazda (اهورامزدا), who is hailed as the supreme being of the universe. Opposed to Ahura Mazda is Angra Mainyu (انجرامنیو), who is personified as a destructive spirit and the adversary of all things that are good. As such, the Zoroastrian religion combines a dualistic cosmology of good and evil with an eschatological outlook predicting the ultimate triumph of Ahura Mazda over evil.[1] Opinions vary among scholars as to whether Zoroastrianism is monotheistic,[1] polytheistic,[2] henotheistic,[3] or a combination of all three.[4] Zoroastrianism shaped Iranian culture and history, while scholars differ on whether it significantly influenced ancient Western philosophy and the Abrahamic religions,[5][6] or gradually reconciled with other religions and traditions, such as Christianity and Islam.[7]

Originating from Zoroaster's reforms of the ancient Iranian religion, Zoroastrianism began during the Avestan period (possibly as early as the 2nd millennium BCE), but was first recorded in the mid-6th century BCE. For the following millennium, it was the official religion of successive Iranian polities, beginning with the Achaemenid Empire, which formalized and institutionalized many of its tenets and rituals, and ending with the Sasanian Empire, which revitalized the faith and standardized its teachings.[8] In the 7th century CE, the rise of Islam and the ensuing Muslim conquest of Iran marked the beginning of the decline of Zoroastrianism. The persecution of Zoroastrians by the early Muslims in the nascent Rashidun Caliphate prompted much of the community to migrate to the Indian subcontinent, where they were granted asylum and became the progenitors of today's Parsis. Once numbering in the millions, the world's total Zoroastrian population is estimated to comprise between 110,000 and 120,000 people, with most of them residing either in India (50,000–60,000), in Iran (15,000–25,000), or in North America (22,000). The religion is thought to be declining due to restrictions on conversion, strict endogamy, and low birth rates.

The central beliefs and practices of Zoroastrianism are contained in the Avesta, a compendium of sacred texts assembled over several centuries. Its oldest and most central component are the Gathas, purported to be the direct teachings of Zoroaster and his account of conversations with Ahura Mazda. These writings are part of a major section of the Avesta called the Yasna, which forms the core of Zoroastrian liturgy. Zoroaster's religious philosophy divided the early Iranian gods of Proto-Indo-Iranian paganism into emanations of the natural world—the ahura and the daeva; the former class consisting of divinities to be revered and the latter class consisting of divinities to be rejected and condemned. Zoroaster proclaimed that Ahura Mazda was the supreme creator and sustaining force of the universe, working in gētīg (the visible material realm) and mēnōg (the invisible spiritual and mental realm) through the Amesha Spenta, a class of seven divine entities that represent various aspects of the universe and the highest moral good. Emanating from Ahura Mazda is Spenta Mainyu (the Holy or Bountiful Spirit), the source of life and goodness,[9] which is opposed by Angra Mainyu (the Destructive or Opposing Spirit), who is born from Aka Manah (evil thought). Angra Mainyu was further developed by Middle Persian literature into Ahriman (𐬐𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬌), Ahura Mazda's direct adversary.

Zoroastrian doctrine holds that, within this cosmic dichotomy, human beings have the choice between Asha (truth, cosmic order), the principle of righteousness or "rightness" that is promoted and embodied by Ahura Mazda, and Druj (falsehood, deceit), the essential nature of Angra Mainyu that expresses itself as greed, wrath, and envy.[10] Thus, the central moral precepts of the religion are good thoughts (hwnata), good words (hakhta), and good deeds (hvarshta), which are recited in many prayers and ceremonies.[5][11][12] Many of the practices and beliefs of ancient Iranian religion can still be seen in Zoroastrianism, such as reverence for nature and its elements, such as water (aban). Fire (atar) is held by Zoroastrians to be particularly sacred as a symbol of Ahura Mazda himself, serving as a focal point of many ceremonies and rituals, and serving as the basis for Zoroastrian places of worship, which are known as fire temples.

Etymology

The name Zoroaster (Ζωροάστηρ) is a Greek rendering of the Avestan name Zarathustra. He is known as Zartosht and Zardosht in Persian and Zaratosht in Gujarati.[13] The Zoroastrian name of the religion is Mazdayasna, which combines Mazda- with the Avestan word yasna, meaning "worship, devotion".[14] In English, an adherent of the faith is commonly called a Zoroastrian or a Zarathustrian. An older expression still used today is Behdin, meaning "of the good religion", deriving from beh < Middle Persian weh 'good' + din < Middle Persian dēn < Avestan daēnā".[15] In the Zoroastrian liturgy, this term is used as a title for a lay individual who has been formally inducted into the religion in a Navjote ceremony, in contrast to the priestly titles of osta, osti, ervad (hirbod), mobed and dastur.[16]

The first surviving reference to Zoroaster in English scholarship is attributed to Thomas Browne (1605–1682), who briefly refers to Zoroaster in his 1643 *Religio Medici*. [17] The term Mazdaism (/ˈmæzdə.ɪzəm/) is an alternative form in English used as well for the faith, taking Mazda- from the name Ahura Mazda and adding the suffix -ism to suggest a belief system.[18]

Theology

See also: Criticism of Zoroastrianism and Religious influences on Zoroastrianism

The theological category of Zoroastrianism is hard to define. The reasons are the difficulties in assigning precise dates to the principal texts and the fact that many contain much older material. Furthermore, Zoroastrianism shaped only slowly over time and was not complete even by the time of the Muslim conquest of Persia. Polytheistic, monotheistic, and dualistic strands can be identified in the wider Zoroastrian tradition, with dualism being the dominant tendency. The major difference to Manichaeism lies in the insistence of good in the creation account.[19]

Some scholars believe Zoroastrianism started as an Indo-Iranian polytheistic religion: according to Yujin Nagasawa, "like the rest of the

Zoroastrian texts, the Old Avesta does not teach monotheism".[20] By contrast, Md. Sayem characterizes Zoroastrianism as being one of the oldest monotheistic religions in the world.[21]

Zoroastrians treat Ahura Mazda as the supreme god, but believe in lesser divinities known as yazatas ("beings worthy of worship"), who share some similarities with the angels in Abrahamic religions.[22] These yazatas include Anahita, Sraosha, Mithra, Rashnu, and Tishtrya. Historian Richard Foltz has put forth evidence that Iranians of the pre-Islamic era worshipped all these figures; especially the gods Mithra and Anahita.[23]

Prods Oktor Skjærvø states Zoroastrianism is henotheistic, and "a dualistic and polytheistic religion, but with one supreme god, who is the father of the ordered cosmos".[3] Brian Arthur Brown states that this is unclear, because historic texts present a conflicting picture, ranging from Zoroastrianism's belief in "one god, two gods, or a best god henotheism".[24] Economist Mario Ferrero suggests that Zoroastrianism transitioned from polytheism to monotheism due to political and economic pressures.[25]

In the 19th century, through contact with Western academics and missionaries, Zoroastrianism experienced a massive theological change that still affects it today. The Rev. John Wilson led various missionary campaigns in India against the Parsi community, disparaging the Parsis for their "dualism" and "polytheism" and as having unnecessary rituals while declaring the Avesta to not be "divinely inspired". This caused mass dismay in the relatively uneducated Parsi community, which blamed its priests and led to some conversions towards Christianity.[citation needed]

The arrival of the German orientalist and philologist Martin Haug led to a rallied defense of the faith through Haug's reinterpretation of the Avesta through Christianized and European orientalist lens. Haug postulated that Zoroastrianism was solely monotheistic with all other divinities reduced to the status of angels while Ahura Mazda became both omnipotent and the

source of evil as well as good. Haug's thinking was subsequently disseminated as a Parsi interpretation, thus corroborating Haug's theory, and the idea became so popular that it is now almost universally accepted as doctrine (though being re-evaluated in modern Zoroastrianism and academia).[26] It has been argued by Almut Hintze that this designation of monotheism is not wholly perfect and that Zoroastrianism instead has its "own form of monotheism" which combines elements of dualism and polytheism.[27] Farhang Mehr asserts that Zoroastrianism is principally monotheistic with some dualistic elements.[28]

Lenorant and Chevallier assert that Zoroastrianism's concept of divinity covers both being and mind as immanent entities, describing Zoroastrianism as having a belief in an immanent self-creating universe with consciousness as its special attribute, thereby putting Zoroastrianism in the pantheistic fold sharing its origin with Indian Hinduism.[29][30]

Nature of the divine

Zoroastrianism contains multiple classes of divine beings, who are typically organised into tiers and spheres of influence.[citation needed]

Ahuras

Main article: Ahura

The Ahura are a class of divine beings "inherited by Zoroastrianism from the prehistoric Indo-Iranian religion. In the Rig Veda, asura denotes the "older gods", such as the "Father Asura", Varuna, and Mitra, who originally ruled over the primeval undifferentiated Chaos." [31]

Ahura Mazda

Main article: Ahuramazda

Ahura Mazda, also known as Oromasdes, Ohrmazd, Ormazd, Ormusd,

Hoormazd, Harzoo, Hormazd, Hormaz and Hurmz, is the creator deity and the supreme god in Zoroastrianism. Ahura Mazda stands for the dual deity Mitrá-Váruṇā of the Hindu holy book known as the Rigveda.[31]

According to scholars, Ahura Mazda is an uncreated, omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent God who has created the spiritual and material existences out of infinite light, and maintains the cosmic law of Asha. He is the first and most invoked spirit in Yasna, and is unrivaled, has no equals and presides over all creation.[32] In Avesta, Ahura Mazda is the only true God, and the representation of goodness, light, and truth. He is in conflict with the evil spirit Angra Mainyu, the representation of evil, darkness, and deceit. Angra Mainyu's goal is to tempt humans away from Ahura Mazda. Notably, Angra Mainyu is not a creation of Ahura Mazda but an independent entity.[33] The belief in Ahura Mazda, the "Lord of Wisdom" who is considered an all-encompassing Deity and the only existing one, is the foundation of Zoroastrianism.[34]

Ahura Mithra

Main article: Mithraism

Mitra, also called Mithra, was originally an Indo-Iranian god of "covenant, agreement, treaty, alliance, promise." Mitra is considered a being worthy of worship and is "characterized by riches".[35]

Yazata

Main article: Yazatas

The Yazata (Avestan: yazatā) are divine beings worshiped by song and sacrifice in Zoroastrianism, in accordance with the Avesta. The word 'Yazata' is derived from 'Yazdan', the Old Persian word for 'god',[36] and literally means "divinity worthy of worship or veneration". As a concept, it also contains a wide range of other meanings; though generally signifying (or used as an epithet of) a divinity.[37][38]

The origins of Yazata are varied, with many also being featured as gods in Hinduism, or other Iranian religions. In modern Zoroastrianism, the Yazata are considered holy emanations of the creator, always devoted to him and obey the will of Ahura Mazda. While subject to repression by the Islamic Caliphate, the Yazata were often framed as "angels" to counter accusation of polytheism (shirk).[39] According to the Avesta The Yazata assist Ahura Mazda in his battle against the evil spirit, and are hypostases of moral or physical aspects of creation. The yazatas collectively are "the good powers under Ahura Mazda", who is "the greatest of the yazatas".[36]

Notable Yazatas

Ahura Mazda

Mitra or Mithra

Anahita – formerly an Iranian water goddess

Ātar (Fire)

Rashnu, one of the three judges who pass judgment on the souls of people after death

Sraosha or Srōsh

Verethragna – who may be the Vedic god Indra

Amesha Spentas

Yazatas are further divided into Amesha Spentas, their "ham-kar" or "Collaborators" who are Lower Ranking divinities,[40] and also certain healing plants, primordial creatures, the fravashis of the dead, and certain prayers that are themselves considered holy.

The Amesha Spentas and their "ham-kar" or "collaborator" Yazatas are as follows:

Vohu Manah + Mah / Geush Urvan / Ram

Asha Vahishta + Atar / Sraosha / Verethraghna

Kshatra Vairya + Khwar / Mithra / Asman / Anaghran

Spenta Armaiti + Ap / Daena / Ashi / Manthra Spenta

Haurvatat + Tishtriya / Fravashi / Vata

Ameretat + Rashnu / Arshtat / Zamyad[40]

Principal beliefs

Tenets of faith

Faravahar, one of the primary symbols of Zoroastrianism, believed to be the depiction of a Fravashi or the Khvarenah.

In Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda is the beginning and the end, the creator of everything that can and cannot be seen, the eternal and uncreated, the all-good and source of Asha.[14] In the Gathas, the most sacred texts of Zoroastrianism thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself, Zoroaster acknowledged the highest devotion to Ahura Mazda, with worship and adoration also given to Ahura Mazda's manifestations (Amesha Spenta) and the other ahuras (Yazata) that support Ahura Mazda.[41]

Daena (din in modern Persian and meaning "that which is seen") is representative of the sum of one's spiritual conscience and attributes, which through one's choice Asha is either strengthened or weakened in the Daena. [42] Traditionally, the manthras (similar to the Hindu sacred utterance mantra) prayer formulas, are believed to be of immense power and the vehicles of Asha and creation used to maintain good and fight evil.[43] Daena should not be confused with the fundamental principle of Asha, believed to be the cosmic order which governs and permeates all existence, and the concept of which governed the life of the ancient Indo-Iranians. For these, asha was the course of everything observable—the motion of the planets and

astral bodies; the progression of the seasons; and the pattern of daily nomadic herdsman life, governed by regular metronomic events such as sunrise and sunset, and was strengthened through truth-telling and following the Threefold Path.[44]

All physical creation (getig) was thus determined to run according to a master plan—inherent to Ahura Mazda—and violations of the order (druj) were violations against creation, and thus violations against Ahura Mazda. [45] This concept of asha versus the druj should not be confused with Western and especially Christian notions of good versus evil, for although both forms of opposition express moral conflict, the asha versus druj concept is more systemic and less personal, representing, for instance, chaos (that opposes order); or "uncreation", evident as natural decay (that opposes creation); or more simply "the lie" (that opposes truth and goodness).[44] Moreover, in the role as the one uncreated creator of all, Ahura Mazda is not the creator of druj, which is "nothing", anti-creation, and thus (likewise) uncreated and developed as the antithesis of existence through choice.[46]

A Parsi Wedding, 1905

In this schema of asha versus druj, mortal beings (both humans and animals) play a critical role, for they too are created. Here, in their lives, they are active participants in the conflict, and it is their spiritual duty to defend Asha, which is under constant assault and would decay in strength without counteraction.[44] Throughout the Gathas, Zoroaster emphasizes deeds and actions within society and accordingly extreme asceticism is frowned upon in Zoroastrianism but moderate forms are allowed within.[47]

Humata, Huxta, Huvarshta (Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds), the Threefold Path of Asha, is considered the core maxim of Zoroastrianism especially by modern practitioners. In Zoroastrianism, good transpires for those who do righteous deeds for its own sake, not for the search of reward. Those who do evil are said to be attacked and confused by the druj and are

responsible for aligning themselves back to Asha by following this path.[48] There is also a heavy emphasis on spreading happiness, mostly through charity,[49] and respecting the spiritual equality and duty of both men and women.[50]

Central to Zoroastrianism is the emphasis on moral choice, to choose the responsibility and duty for which one is in the mortal world, or to give up this duty and so facilitate the work of druj. Similarly, predestination is rejected in Zoroastrian teaching and the absolute free will of all conscious beings is core, with even divine beings having the ability to choose. Humans bear responsibility for all situations they are in, and in the way they act toward one another. Reward, punishment, happiness, and grief all depend on how individuals live their lives.[51]

In Zoroastrian tradition, life is a temporary state in which a mortal is expected to participate actively in the continuing battle between Asha and Druj. Prior to its incarnation at the birth of the child, the urvan (soul) of an individual is still united with its fravashi (personal/higher spirit), which has existed since Ahura Mazda created the universe. Prior to the splitting off of the urvan, the fravashi participates in the maintenance of creation led by Ahura Mazda. During the life of a given individual, the fravashi acts as a source of inspiration to perform good actions and as a spiritual protector. The fravashis of ancestors cultural, spiritual, and heroic, associated with illustrious bloodlines, are venerated and can be called upon to aid the living. [52]

The religion states that active and ethical participation in life through good deeds formed from good thoughts and good words is necessary to ensure happiness and to keep chaos at bay. This active participation is a central element in Zoroaster's concept of free will, and Zoroastrianism as such rejects extreme forms of asceticism and monasticism but historically has allowed for moderate expressions of these concepts.[47] On the fourth day after death, the urvan is reunited with its fravashi, whereupon the experiences of life in the material world are collected for use in the continuing battle for good in the spiritual world. For the most part,

Zoroastrianism does not have a notion of reincarnation; albeit Followers of Ilm-e-Kshnoom in India, among other currently non-traditional opinions, believe in reincarnation and practice vegetarianism.[53]

Zoroastrianism's emphasis on the protection and veneration of nature and its elements has led some to proclaim it as the "world's first proponent of ecology." [54] The Avesta and other texts call for the protection of water, earth, fire, and air making it, in effect, an ecological religion: "It is not surprising that Mazdaism... is called the first ecological religion. The reverence for Yazatas (divine spirits) emphasizes the preservation of nature" (Avesta: Yasnas 1.19, 3.4, 16.9; Yashts 6.3–4, 10.13). [55] However, this particular assertion is limited to natural forces held as emanations of asha by the fact that early Zoroastrians had a duty to exterminate "evil" species, a dictate no longer followed in modern Zoroastrianism. [56] Although there have been various theological statements supporting vegetarianism in Zoroastrianism's history and those who believe that Zoroaster was vegetarian. [57]

Zoroastrianism is not entirely uniform in theological and philosophical thought, especially with historical and modern influences having a significant impact on individual and local beliefs, practices, values, and vocabulary, sometimes merging with tradition and in other cases displacing it. [58] The ultimate purpose in the life of a practicing Zoroastrian is to become an ashavan (a master of Asha) and to bring happiness into the world, which contributes to the cosmic battle against evil. The core teachings of Zoroastrianism include:

Following the threefold path of Asha: Humata, Hūxta, Huvarshta (lit. 'good thoughts, good words, good deeds'). [48]

Practicing charity to keep one's soul aligned with Asha and thus with spreading happiness. [49]

The spiritual equality and duty of men and women alike. [50]

Being good for the sake of goodness and without the hope of reward (see

Ashem Vohu).

Cosmology

Main article: Zoroastrian cosmology

Cosmogony

According to the Zoroastrian creation myth, there is one universal, transcendent, all-good, and uncreated supreme creator deity Ahura Mazda, [14] or the "Wise Lord" (Ahura meaning "Lord" and Mazda meaning "Wisdom" in Avestan).[14][59] Zoroaster keeps the two attributes separate as two different concepts in most of the Gathas yet sometimes combines them into one form. Zoroaster also proclaims that Ahura Mazda is omniscient but not omnipotent.[14] Ahura Mazda existed in light and goodness above, while Angra Mainyu, (also referred to in later texts as "Ahriman"),[60][61] the destructive spirit/mentality, existed in darkness and ignorance below. They have existed independently of each other for all time, and manifest contrary substances. In the Gathas, Ahura Mazda is noted as working through emanations known as the Amesha Spenta[62] and with the help of "other ahuras".[26] These divine beings called Amesha Spentas, support him and are representative and guardians of different aspects of creation and the ideal personality.[62] Ahura Mazda is immanent in humankind and interacts with creation through these bounteous/holy divinities. In addition to these, He is assisted by a league of countless divinities called Yazatas, meaning "worthy of worship." Each Yazata is generally a hypostasis of a moral or physical aspect of creation. Asha[14][44] is the main spiritual force which comes from Ahura Mazda.[44] It is the cosmic order and is the antithesis of chaos, which is evident as druj, falsehood and disorder, that comes from Angra Mainyu.[46][32] The resulting cosmic conflict involves all of creation, mental/spiritual and material, including humanity at its core, which has an active role to play in the conflict.[63] The main representative of Asha in this conflict is Spenta Mainyu, the creative spirit/mentality.[60] Ahura Mazda then created the material and visible world itself in order to ensnare evil. He created the floating, egg-shaped universe in two parts: first the spiritual (menog) and 3,000 years later, the physical (getig).[45] Ahura Mazda then created Gayomard, the archetypical perfect man, and Gavaevodata, the primordial bovine.[51]

While Ahura Mazda created the universe and humankind, Angra Mainyu, whose very nature is to destroy, miscreated demons, evil daevas, and noxious creatures (khrafstar) such as snakes, ants, and flies. Angra Mainyu created an opposite, evil being for each good being, except for humans, which he found he could not match. Angra Mainyu invaded the universe through the base of the sky, inflicting Gayomard and the bull with suffering and death. However, the evil forces were trapped in the universe and could not retreat. The dying primordial man and bovine emitted seeds, which were protected by Mah, the Moon. From the bull's seed grew all beneficial plants and animals of the world and from the man's seed grew a plant whose leaves became the first human couple. Humans thus struggle in a two-fold universe of the material and spiritual trapped and in long combat with evil. The evils of this physical world are not products of an inherent weakness but are the fault of Angra Mainyu's assault on creation. This assault turned the perfectly flat, peaceful, and daily illuminated world into a mountainous, violent place that is half night.[51] According to Zoroastrian cosmology, in articulating the Ahuna Vairya formula, Ahura Mazda made the ultimate triumph of good against Angra Mainyu evident.[64] Ahura Mazda will ultimately prevail over the evil Angra Mainyu, at which point reality will undergo a cosmic renovation called Frashokereti[65] and limited time will end. In the final renovation, all of creation—even the souls of the dead that were initially banished to or chose to descend into "darkness"—will be reunited with Ahura Mazda in the Kshatra Vairya (meaning "best dominion"),[66] being resurrected to immortality.[citation needed]

Cosmography

Zoroastrian cosmography, which refers to the description of the structure of the cosmos in Zoroastrian literature and theology, involves a primary division of the cosmos into heaven and earth.[67] The heaven is composed of three parts: the lower-most part, which is where the fixed stars may be found; the middle part, where the domain of the moon is located, and the upper part, which is the domain of the sun and unreachable by Ahirman.[68] Further above the highest level of the heaven/sky includes regions described as the Endless Lights, as well as the Thrones of Amahraspandân and Ohrmazd.[69] Although this is the basic framework which occurs in Avestan

texts, later Zoroastrian literature would elaborate on this picture by further subdividing the lowest part of heaven to achieve a total of six or seven layers.[70] The Earth itself was described as possessing three primary mountains: Mount Hukairiia, whose peak was the focal point of the revolution of the star Sadwēs; Mount Haraitī, whose peak was the focal point of the revolution of the sun and the moon, and the greatest of them all, the Harā Bērēz whose peak was located at the center of the Earth and which was the first in a chain of 2,244 mountains which, together, encircled the Earth. [71] Although the planets are not described in early Zoroastrian sources, they entered Zoroastrian thought in the Middle Persian period: they were demonized and took on the names Anāhīd (Pahlavi for Venus), Tīr (Mercury), Wahrām (Mars), Ohrmazd (Jupiter), and Kēwān (Saturn).[72]

Eschatology

Main article: Frashokereti

Individual judgment at death is at the Chinvat Bridge ("bridge of judgement" or "bridge of choice"), which each human must cross, facing a spiritual judgment, though modern belief is split as to whether it is representative of a mental decision during life to choose between good and evil or an afterworld location. Humans' actions under their free will through choice determine the outcome. According to tradition, the soul is judged by the Yazatas Mithra, Sraosha, and Rashnu, where depending on the verdict one is either greeted at the bridge by a beautiful, sweet-smelling maiden or by an ugly, foul-smelling old hag representing their Daena affected by their actions in life. The maiden leads the dead safely across the bridge, which widens and becomes pleasant for the righteous, towards the House of Song. The hag leads the dead down a bridge that narrows to a razor's edge and is full of stench until the departed falls off into the abyss towards the House of Lies. [51][73] Those with a balance of good and evil go to Hamistagan, a purgatorial realm mentioned in the 9th century work Dadestan-i Denig.[74]

The House of Lies is considered temporary and reformatory; punishments fit the crimes, and souls do not rest in eternal damnation. Hell contains foul smells and evil food, a smothering darkness, and souls are packed tightly together although they believe they are in total isolation.[51]

In ancient Zoroastrian eschatology, a 3,000-year struggle between good and evil will be fought, punctuated by evil's final assault. During the final assault, the sun and moon will darken, and humankind will lose its reverence for religion, family, and elders. The world will fall into winter, and Angra Mainyu's most fearsome miscreant, Azi Dahaka, will break free and terrorize the world.[51]

According to legend, the final savior of the world, known as the Saoshyant, will be born to a virgin impregnated by the seed of Zoroaster while bathing in a lake. The Saoshyant will raise the dead—including those in all afterworlds—for final judgment, returning the wicked to hell to be purged of bodily sin. Next, all will wade through a river of molten metal in which the righteous will not burn but through which the impure will be completely purified. The forces of good will ultimately triumph over evil, rendering it forever impotent but not destroyed. The Saoshyant and Ahura Mazda will offer a bull as a final sacrifice for all time and all humans will become immortal. Mountains will again flatten and valleys will rise; the House of Song will descend to the moon, and the earth will rise to meet them both.[51] Humanity will require two judgments because there are as many aspects to our being: spiritual (menog) and physical (getig).[51]

Practices and rituals

An 8th century Tang dynasty Chinese clay figurine of a Sogdian man wearing a distinctive cap and face veil, possibly a camel rider or even a Zoroastrian priest engaging in a ritual at a fire temple, since face veils were used to avoid contaminating the holy fire with breath or saliva; Museum of Oriental Art (Turin), Italy.[75]

Throughout Zoroastrian history, shrines and temples have been the focus of worship and pilgrimage for adherents of the religion. Early Zoroastrians were recorded as worshipping in the 5th century BCE on mounds and hills where fires were lit below the open skies.[76] In the wake of Achaemenid

expansion, shrines were constructed throughout the empire and particularly influenced the role of Mithra, Aredvi Sura Anahita, Verethragna and Tishtrya, alongside other traditional Yazata who all have hymns within the Avesta and also local deities and culture-heroes. Today, enclosed and covered fire temples tend to be the focus of community worship where fires of varying grades are maintained by the clergy assigned to the temples.[77]

The incorporation of cultural and local rituals is quite common and traditions have been passed down in historically Zoroastrian communities such as herbal healing practices, wedding ceremonies, and the like.[78][79] [43] Traditionally, Zoroastrian rituals have also included shamanic elements involving mystical methods such as spirit travel to the invisible realm and involving the consumption of fortified wine, Haoma, mang, and other ritual aids.[80][45][81][82][83]

Ossuary with reliefs of Zoroastrian priests attending a fire, Mullakurgan (near Samarkand), Uzbekistan, 7–8th century CE.[84]

According to former South Asian studies professor Bettina Robotika, purification ceremonies associated with water (aban) and fire (atar) are considered the basis of Zoroastrian ritual life. Some Zoroastrian communities practice ritual exposure, mainly in regions of the Indian subcontinent where the practice is legal and there are healthy populations of scavenger birds. A corpse is considered a host for decay or druj, and scripture enjoins that it be disposed in a manner that does not pollute the good creation. Structures called Towers of Silence are commonly identified with this practice.[85]

The central ritual of Zoroastrianism is the Yasna, which is a recitation of the eponymous book of the Avesta and sacrificial ritual ceremony involving Haoma.[86] Extensions to the Yasna ritual are possible through use of the Visperad and Vendidad, but such an extended ritual is rare in modern Zoroastrianism.[87][88] The Yasna itself descended from Indo-Iranian

sacrificial ceremonies and animal sacrifice of varying degrees are mentioned in the Avesta and are still practiced in Zoroastrianism albeit through reduced forms such as the sacrifice of fat before meals.[89] High rituals such as the Yasna are considered to be the purview of the Mobads with a corpus of individual and communal rituals and prayers included in the Khordeh Avesta.[86][90]

A Zoroastrian is welcomed into the faith through the Navjote/Sedreh Pushi ceremony, which is traditionally conducted during the later childhood or pre-teen years of the aspirant, though there is no defined age limit for the ritual.[43][91] After the ceremony, Zoroastrians are encouraged to wear their sedreh (ritual shirt) and kushti (ritual girdle) daily as a spiritual reminder and for mystical protection, though reformist Zoroastrians tend to only wear them during festivals, ceremonies, and prayers.[92][43][91]

Historically, Zoroastrians are encouraged to pray the five daily Gāhs and to maintain and celebrate the various holy festivals of the Zoroastrian calendar, which can differ from community to community.[93][94] Zoroastrian prayers, called manthras, are conducted usually with hands outstretched in imitation of Zoroaster's prayer style described in the Gathas and are of a reflectionary and supplicant nature believed to be endowed with the ability to banish evil.[95][96][64] Devout Zoroastrians are known to cover their heads during prayer, either with traditional topi, scarves, other headwear, or even just their hands. However, full coverage and veiling which is traditional in Islamic practice is not a part of Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian women in Iran wear their head coverings displaying hair and their faces to defy mandates by the Islamic Republic of Iran.[97]

Scripture

See also: Zoroastrian literature

Avesta

Main articles: Avesta and Avestan

The Avesta is a collection of the central religious texts of Zoroastrianism written in the old Iranian dialect of Avestan. The history of the Avesta is speculated upon in many Pahlavi texts with varying degrees of authority, with the current version of the Avesta dating at oldest from the times of the Sasanian Empire.[98] The Avesta was "composed at different times, providing a series of snapshots of the religion that allow historians to see how it changed over time".[99] According to Middle Persian tradition, Ahura Mazda created the 21 Nasks of the original Avesta which Zoroaster brought to Vishtaspa. Here, two copies were created, one which was put in the house of archives and the other put in the Imperial treasury. During Alexander's conquest of Persia, the Avesta (written on 1,200 ox-hides) was burned, and the scientific sections that the Greeks could use were dispersed among themselves. However, there is no strong historical evidence for this and they remain contested despite affirmations from the Zoroastrian tradition, whether it be the Denkart, Tansar-nāma, Ardāy Wirāz Nāmag, Bundahsin, Zand-i Wahman yasn or the transmitted oral tradition.[98][100]

As tradition continues, under the reign of King Valax (identified with a Vologases of the Arsacid dynasty[101]), an attempt was made to restore what was considered the Avesta. During the Sassanid Empire, Ardeshir ordered Tansar, his high priest, to finish the work that King Valax had started. Shapur I sent priests to locate the scientific text portions of the Avesta that were in the possession of the Greeks.[102] Under Shapur II, Arderbad Mahrespandand revised the canon to ensure its orthodox character, while under Khosrow I, the Avesta was translated into Pahlavi.

The compilation of the Avesta can be authoritatively traced, however, to the Sasanian Empire, of which only fraction survive today if the Middle Persian literature is correct.[98] The later manuscripts all date from after the fall of the Sasanian Empire, the latest being from 1288, 590 years after the fall of the Sasanian Empire. The texts that remain today are the Gathas, Yasna, Visperad and the Vendidad, of which the latter's inclusion is disputed within the faith.[103] Along with these texts is the individual, communal, and ceremonial prayer book called the Khordeh Avesta, which contains the Yashts and other important hymns, prayers, and rituals. The rest of the materials from the Avesta are called "Avestan fragments" in that they are

written in Avestan, incomplete, and generally of unknown provenance.[104]

Middle Persian (Pahlavi)

Middle Persian and Pahlavi works created in the 9th and 10th century contain many religious Zoroastrian books, as most of the writers and copyists were part of the Zoroastrian clergy. The most significant and important books of this era include the Denkard, Bundahishn, Menog-i Khrad, Selections of Zadspram, Jamasp Namag, Epistles of Manucher, Rivayats, Dadestan-i-Denig, and Arda Viraf Namag. All Middle Persian texts written on Zoroastrianism during this time period are considered secondary works on the religion, and not scripture.[citation needed]

History

Zoroaster

Main article: Zoroaster

Zoroastrianism was founded by Zoroaster in ancient Iran. The precise date of the founding of the religion is uncertain and estimates vary wildly from 2000 BCE to "200 years before Alexander". Zoroaster was born – in either Northeast Iran or Southwest Afghanistan – into a culture with a polytheistic religion, which featured excessive animal sacrifice[105] and the excessive ritual use of intoxicants. His life was influenced profoundly by the attempts of his people to find peace and stability in the face of constant threats of raiding and conflict. Zoroaster's birth and early life are little documented but speculated upon heavily in later texts. What is known is recorded in the Gathas, forming the core of the Avesta, which contain hymns thought to have been composed by Zoroaster himself. Born into the Spitama clan, he refers to himself as a poet-priest and prophet. He had a wife, three sons, and three daughters, the numbers of which are gathered from various texts.[106]

Zoroaster rejected many of the gods of the Bronze Age Iranians and their oppressive class structure, in which the Kavis and Karapans (princes and priests) controlled the ordinary people. He also opposed cruel animal

sacrifices and the excessive use of the possibly hallucinogenic Haoma plant (conjectured to have been a species of ephedra or *Peganum harmala*), but did not condemn either practice outright, providing moderation was observed.[89][107]

Legendary accounts

According to later Zoroastrian tradition, when Zoroaster was 30 years old, he went into the Daiti river to draw water for a Haoma ceremony; when he emerged, he received a vision of Vohu Manah. After this, Vohu Manah took him to the other six Amesha Spentas, where he received the completion of his vision.[108] This vision radically transformed his view of the world, and he tried to teach this view to others. Zoroaster believed in one supreme creator deity and acknowledged this creator's emanations (Amesha Spenta) and other divinities which he called Ahuras (Yazata).[31] Some of the deities of the old religion, the Daevas (etymologically similar to the Sanskrit Devas), appeared to delight in war and strife and were condemned as evil workers of Angra Mainyu by Zoroaster.[109]

Zoroaster's ideas were not taken up quickly; he originally only had one convert: his cousin Maidhyoimanha.[110]

Cypress of Kashmar

Main article: Cypress of Kashmar

The Cypress of Kashmar is a mythical cypress tree of legendary beauty and gargantuan dimensions. It is said to have sprung from a branch brought by Zoroaster from Paradise and to have stood in today's Kashmar in northeastern Iran and to have been planted by Zoroaster in honor of the conversion of King Vishtaspa to Zoroastrianism. According to the Iranian physicist and historian Zakariya al-Qazwini King Vishtaspa had been a patron of Zoroaster who planted the tree himself. In his *ʿAjā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, he further describes how the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil in 247 AH (861 CE) caused the mighty cypress to be felled, and then transported it across Iran, to be used for beams in his new palace at

Samarra. Before, he wanted the tree to be reconstructed before his eyes. This was done in spite of protests by the Iranians, who offered a very great sum of money to save the tree. Al-Mutawakkil never saw the cypress, because he was murdered by a Turkish soldier (possibly in the employ of his son) on the night when it arrived on the banks of the Tigris.[111][112]

Fire Temple of Kashmar

Kashmar Fire Temple was the first Zoroastrian fire temple built by Vishtaspa at the request of Zoroaster in Kashmar. In a part of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the story of finding Zarathustra and accepting Vishtaspa's religion is regulated that after accepting Zoroastrian religion, Vishtaspa sends priests all over the universe And Azar enters the fire temples (domes) and the first of them is Adur Burzen-Mihr who founded in Kashmar and planted a cypress tree in front of the fire temple and made it a symbol of accepting the Bahi religion And he sent priests all over the world, and commanded all the famous men and women to come to that place of worship.[113]

According to the Paikuli inscription, during the Sasanian Empire, Kashmar was part of Greater Khorasan, and the Sasanians worked hard to revive the ancient religion. It still remains a few kilometers above the ancient city of Kashmar in the castle complex of Atashgah.[114]

Early history

See also: Avestan period and Airyanem Vaejah

Geographical horizon of the Avestan people during the Young Avestan period. Sources for the different localizations are in the file description.

The roots of Zoroastrianism are thought to lie in a common prehistoric Indo-Iranian religious system dating back to the early 2nd millennium BCE.[115] The prophet Zoroaster himself, though traditionally dated to the 6th century

BCE,[116][13][117] is thought by many modern historians to have been a reformer of the polytheistic Iranian religion who lived much earlier during the second half of the second millennium BCE.[118][119][120][121] Zoroastrian tradition names Airyanem Vaejah as the home of Zarathustra and the birthplace of the religion. No consensus exists as to the localization of Airyanem Vaejah, but the region of Khwarezm has been considered by modern scholars as a candidate.[122] Zoroastrianism as a religion was not firmly established until centuries later during the Young Avestan period. At this time, the Zoroastrian community was concentrated in the eastern portion of Greater Iran.[123] Although no consensus exists on the chronology of the Avestan period, the lack of any discernable Persian and Median influence in the Avesta makes a time frame in the first half of the first millennium BCE likely.[124]

Classical antiquity

See also: Western references to Zoroaster and Zoroastrianism and Religion in the Achaemenid Empire

Painted clay and alabaster head of a Zoroastrian priest wearing a distinctive Bactrian-style headdress, Takhti-Sangin, Tajikistan, Greco-Bactrian kingdom, 3rd–2nd century BCE.[125]

The Tomb of Cyrus the Great at Pasargadae, Iran

Zoroastrianism enters recorded history in the mid-5th century BCE. Herodotus' The Histories (completed c. 440 BCE) includes a description of Greater Iranian society with what may be recognizably Zoroastrian features, including exposure of the dead.[126]

The Histories is a primary source of information on the early period of the Achaemenid era (648–330 BCE), in particular with respect to the role of the Magi. According to Herodotus, the Magi were the sixth tribe of the Medes (until the unification of the Persian empire under Cyrus the Great, all

Iranians were referred to as "Mede" or "Mada" by the peoples of the Ancient World) and wielded considerable influence at the courts of the Median emperors.[127]

Following the unification of the Median and Persian empires in 550 BCE, Cyrus the Great and later his son Cambyses II curtailed the powers of the Magi after they had attempted to sow dissent following their loss of influence. In 522 BCE, the Magi revolted and set up a rival claimant to the throne. The usurper, pretending to be Cyrus' younger son Smerdis, took power shortly thereafter.[128] Owing to the despotic rule of Cambyses and his long absence in Egypt, "the whole people, Persians, Medes and all the other nations" acknowledged the usurper, especially as he granted a remission of taxes for three years.[127]

Darius I and later Achaemenid emperors acknowledged their devotion to Ahura Mazda in inscriptions, as attested to several times in the Behistun inscription and appear to have continued the model of coexistence with other religions. Whether Darius was a follower of the teachings of Zoroaster has not been conclusively established as there is no indication of note that worship of Ahura Mazda was exclusively a Zoroastrian practice.[129]

According to later Zoroastrian legend (Denkard and the Book of Arda Viraf), many sacred texts were lost when Alexander the Great's troops invaded Persepolis and subsequently destroyed the royal library there. Diodorus Siculus's *Bibliotheca historica*, which was completed c. 60 BCE, appears to substantiate this Zoroastrian legend.[130] According to one archaeological examination, the ruins of the palace of Xerxes I bear traces of having been burned.[131] Whether a vast collection of (semi-)religious texts "written on parchment in gold ink", as suggested by the Denkard, actually existed remains a matter of speculation.[132]

Alexander's conquests largely displaced Zoroastrianism with Hellenistic beliefs,[121] though the religion continued to be practiced many centuries

following the demise of the Achaemenids in mainland Persia and the core regions of the former Achaemenid Empire, most notably Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and the Caucasus. In the Cappadocian kingdom, whose territory was formerly an Achaemenid possession, Persian colonists, cut off from their co-religionists in Iran proper, continued to practice the faith [Zoroastrianism] of their forefathers; and there Strabo, observing in the first century BCE, records (XV.3.15) that these "fire kindlers" possessed many "holy places of the Persian Gods", as well as fire temples.[133] Strabo further states that these were "noteworthy enclosures; and in their midst there is an altar, on which there is a large quantity of ashes and where the magi keep the fire ever burning." [133] It was not until the end of the Parthian Empire (247 BCE – 224 CE) that Zoroastrianism would receive renewed interest.[121]

Late antiquity

See also: Religion in the Parthian era

A Zoroastrian ossuary, 7–8th century CE, Hirman Tepe, Uzbekistan.[134]

As late as the Parthian period, a form of Zoroastrianism was without a doubt the dominant religion in the Armenian lands.[135] The Sassanids aggressively promoted the Zurvanite form of Zoroastrianism, often building fire temples in captured territories to promote the religion. During the period of their centuries-long suzerainty over the Caucasus, the Sassanids made attempts to promote Zoroastrianism there with considerable successes.[citation needed]

Due to its ties to the Christian Roman Empire, Persia's archrival since Parthian times, the Sassanids were suspicious of Roman Christianity, and after the reign of Constantine the Great, sometimes persecuted it.[136] In 451 CE, the Sassanid authority clashed with their Armenian subjects in the Battle of Avarayr, making them officially break with the Roman Church. But the Sassanids tolerated or even sometimes favored the Christianity of the Church of the East. The acceptance of Christianity in Georgia (Caucasian

Iberia) saw the Zoroastrian religion there slowly but surely decline,[137] but as late the 5th century CE, it was still widely practised as something like a second established religion.[138][139]

Decline in the Middle Ages

See also: Persecution of Zoroastrians

A scene from the Hamzanama where Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib Burns Zarthust's Chest and Shatters the Urn with his Ashes

Over the course of 22 years during the 7th century, most of the Sasanian Empire was conquered by the emerging Muslim caliphate.[140] Although the administration of the state was rapidly Islamicized and subsumed under the Umayyad Caliphate, in the beginning "there was little serious pressure" exerted on newly subjected people to adopt Islam.[141] Because of their sheer numbers, the conquered Zoroastrians had to be treated as dhimmis (despite doubts of the validity of this identification that persisted down the centuries),[142] which made them eligible for protection. Islamic jurists took the stance that only Muslims could be perfectly moral, but "unbelievers might as well be left to their iniquities, so long as these did not vex their overlords." [142] In the main, once the conquest was over and "local terms were agreed on", the Arab governors protected the local populations in exchange for tribute.[142]

The Arabs adopted the Sasanian tax-system, both the land-tax levied on landowners and the poll-tax levied on individuals,[142] called jizya, a tax levied on non-Muslims (i.e., the dhimmis). In time, this poll-tax came to be used as a means to humble the non-Muslims, and a number of laws and restrictions evolved to emphasize their inferior status. Under the early orthodox caliphs, as long as the non-Muslims paid their taxes and adhered to the dhimmi laws, administrators were enjoined to leave non-Muslims "in their religion and their land".[143]

Under Abbasid rule, Muslim Iranians (who by then were in the majority) in many instances showed severe disregard for and mistreated local Zoroastrians. For example, in the 9th century, a deeply venerated cypress tree in Khorasan (which Parthian-era legend supposed had been planted by Zoroaster himself) was felled for the construction of a palace in Baghdad, 2,000 miles (3,200 km) away. In the 10th century, on the day that a Tower of Silence had been completed at much trouble and expense, a Muslim official contrived to get up onto it, and to call the adhan (the Muslim call to prayer) from its walls. This was turned into a pretext to annex the building.[144]

Ultimately, Muslim scholars like Al-Biruni found few records left of the belief of for instance the Khawarizmians because figures like Qutayba ibn Muslim "extinguished and ruined in every possible way all those who knew how to write and read the Khawarizmi writing, who knew the history of the country and who studied their sciences." As a result, "these things are involved in so much obscurity that it is impossible to obtain an accurate knowledge of the history of the country since the time of Islam..."[145]

Conversion

Though subject to a new leadership and harassment, the Zoroastrians were able to continue their former ways, although there was a slow but steady social and economic pressure to convert,[146][147] with the nobility and city-dwellers being the first to do so, while Islam was accepted more slowly among the peasantry and landed gentry.[148] "Power and worldly-advantage" now lay with followers of Islam, and although the "official policy was one of aloof contempt, there were individual Muslims eager to proselytize and ready to use all sorts of means to do so." [147]

In time, a tradition evolved by which Islam was made to appear as a partly Iranian religion. One example of this was a legend that Husayn, son of the fourth caliph Ali and grandson of Islam's prophet Muhammad, had married a captive Sassanid princess named Shahrbanu. This "wholly fictitious figure"[149] was said to have borne Husayn a son, the historical fourth Shi'a imam, who insisted that the caliphate rightly belonged to him and his

descendants, and that the Umayyads had wrongfully wrested it from him. The alleged descent from the Sassanid house counterbalanced the Arab nationalism of the Umayyads, and the Iranian national association with a Zoroastrian past was disarmed. Thus, according to scholar Mary Boyce, "it was no longer the Zoroastrians alone who stood for patriotism and loyalty to the past." [149] The "damning indictment" that becoming Muslim was un-Iranian only remained an idiom in Zoroastrian texts. [149]

With Iranian support, the Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750, and in the subsequent caliphate government—that nominally lasted until 1258—Muslim Iranians received marked favor in the new government, both in Iran and at the capital in Baghdad. This mitigated the antagonism between Arabs and Iranians but sharpened the distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Abbasids zealously persecuted heretics, and although this was directed mainly at Muslim sectarians, it also created a harsher climate for non-Muslims. [150]

Survival

The fire temple of Baku, c. 1860

Despite economic and social incentives to convert, Zoroastrianism remained strong in some regions, particularly in those furthest away from the Caliphate capital at Baghdad. In Bukhara (present-day Uzbekistan), resistance to Islam required the 9th-century Arab commander Qutaiba to convert his province four times. The first three times the citizens reverted to their old religion. Finally, the governor made their religion "difficult for them in every way", turned the local fire temple into a mosque, and encouraged the local population to attend Friday prayers by paying each attendee two dirhams. [147] The cities where Arab governors resided were particularly vulnerable to such pressures, and in these cases the Zoroastrians were left with no choice but to either conform or migrate to regions that had a more amicable administration. [147]

The 9th century came to define the great number of Zoroastrian texts that were composed or re-written during the 8th to 10th centuries (excluding copying and lesser amendments, which continued for some time thereafter). All of these works are in the Middle Persian dialect of that period (free of Arabic words) and written in the difficult Pahlavi script (hence the adoption of the term "Pahlavi" as the name of the variant of the language, and of the genre, of those Zoroastrian books). If read aloud, these books would still have been intelligible to the laity. Many of these texts are responses to the tribulations of the time, and all of them include exhortations to stand fast in their religious beliefs.[citation needed]

Fire Temple of Yazd

Museum of Zoroastrians in Kerman

In Khorasan in northeastern Iran, a 10th-century Iranian nobleman brought together four Zoroastrian priests to transcribe a Sassanid-era Middle Persian work titled Book of the Lord (Khwaday Namag) from Pahlavi script into Arabic script. This transcription, which remained in Middle Persian prose (an Arabic version, by al-Muqaffa, also exists), was completed in 957 and subsequently became the basis for Firdausi's Book of Kings. It became enormously popular among both Zoroastrians and Muslims, and also served to propagate the Sassanid justification for overthrowing the Arsacids. [citation needed]

Among migrations were those to cities in (or on the margins of) the great salt deserts, in particular to Yazd and Kerman, which remain centers of Iranian Zoroastrianism to this day. Yazd became the seat of the Iranian high priests during Mongol Ilkhanate rule, when the "best hope for survival [for a non-Muslim] was to be inconspicuous." [151] Crucial to the present-day survival of Zoroastrianism was a migration from the northeastern Iranian town of "Sanjan in south-western Khorasan", [152] to Gujarat, in western India. The descendants of that group are today known as the Parsis—"as the Gujaratis,

from long tradition, called anyone from Iran"[152]—who today represent the larger of the two groups of Zoroastrians in India.[153]

A special container carrying the holy fire from Aden to the Lonavala Agiary, India

The struggle between Zoroastrianism and Islam declined in the 10th and 11th centuries. Local Iranian dynasties, "all vigorously Muslim,"[152] had emerged as largely independent vassals of the Caliphs. In the 16th century, in one of the early letters between Iranian Zoroastrians and their co-religionists in India, the priests of Yazd lamented that "no period [in human history], not even that of Alexander, had been more grievous or troublesome for the faithful than 'this millennium of the demon of Wrath'." [154]

Modern

Further information: Parsis, Irani (India), Zoroastrianism in Iran, and Zoroastrianism in India

A modern Zoroastrian fire temple in Western India

Sadeh in Tehran, 2011

Zoroastrianism has survived into the modern period, particularly in India, where the Parsis are thought to have been present since about the 9th century.[155]

Today Zoroastrianism can be divided in two main schools of thought: reformists and traditionalists. Traditionalists are mostly Parsis and accept, beside the Gathas and Avesta, also the Middle Persian literature and like the

reformists mostly developed in their modern form from 19th century developments. They generally do not allow conversion to the faith and, as such, for someone to be a Zoroastrian they must be born of Zoroastrian parents. Some traditionalists recognize the children of mixed marriages as Zoroastrians, though usually only if the father is a born Zoroastrian.[156] Not all Zoroastrians identify with either school. Notable examples gaining traction include Neo-Zoroastrians/Revivalists, which are usually reinterpretations of Zoroastrianism appealing towards Western concerns, [157] and centering the idea of Zoroastrianism as a living religion. These advocate the revival and maintenance of old rituals and prayers while supporting ethical and social progressive reforms. Both of these latter schools tend to center the Gathas without outright rejecting other texts except the Vendidad.[158]

From the 19th century onward, the Parsis gained a reputation for their education and widespread influence in all aspects of society. They played an instrumental role in the economic development of the region over many decades; several of the best-known business conglomerates of India are run by Parsi-Zoroastrians, including the Tata,[159] Godrej, Wadia families, and others.[160]

For a variety of social and political factors, the Zoroastrians of the Indian subcontinent, namely the Parsis and Iranis, have not engaged in conversion since at least the 18th century. Zoroastrian high priests have historically opined there is no reason to not allow conversion, which is also supported by the Revayats and other scripture, though later priests have condemned these judgements.[161][26] Within Iran, many of the beleaguered Zoroastrians have been also historically opposed or not practically concerned with the matter of conversion. Currently though, The Council of Tehran Mobeds (the highest ecclesiastical authority within Iran) endorses conversion but conversion from Islam to Zoroastrianism is illegal under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[156][26]

Though the Armenians share a rich history affiliated with Zoroastrianism (that eventually declined with the advent of Christianity), reports indicate

that there were Zoroastrians in Armenia until the 1920s.[162]

At the request of the government of Tajikistan, UNESCO declared 2003 a year to celebrate the "3,000th anniversary of Zoroastrian culture", with special events throughout the world. In 2011, the Tehran Mobeds Anjuman announced that for the first time in the history of modern Iran and of the modern Zoroastrian communities worldwide, women had been ordained in Iran and North America as mobedyars, meaning women assistant mobeds (Zoroastrian clergy).[163][164][165] The women hold official certificates and can perform the lower-rung religious functions and can initiate people into the religion.[166][167]

The current Zoroastrian population is said be around 100,000 to 200,000 and reportedly declining.[168] However, further studies are needed to confirm this, as numbers have also been rising in some areas, such as Iran.[169][170] [171]

Demographics

Further information: List of countries by Zoroastrian population and List of Zoroastrians

The sacred Zoroastrian pilgrimage shrine of Chak Chak in Yazd, Iran

Zoroastrian communities internationally tend to comprise mostly two main groups of people: Indian Parsis and Iranian Zoroastrians. According to a study in 2012 by the Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America, the number of Zoroastrians worldwide was estimated to be between 111,691 and 121,962. The number is imprecise because of diverging counts in Iran.[167]

Iran, Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Central Asia

Main article: Zoroastrians in Iran

Parsi Navjote ceremony (rites of admission into the Zoroastrian faith)

Iran's figures of Zoroastrians have ranged widely; the last census (1974) before the revolution of 1979 revealed 21,400 Zoroastrians.[172] Some 10,000 adherents remain in the Central Asian regions that were once considered the traditional stronghold of Zoroastrianism, i.e., Bactria (see also Balkh), which is in Northern Afghanistan; Sogdiana; Margiana; and other areas close to Zoroaster's homeland. In Iran, emigration, out-marriage and low birth rates are likewise leading to a decline in the Zoroastrian population. Zoroastrian groups in Iran say their number is approximately 60,000.[173] According to the Iranian census data from 2011 the number of Zoroastrians in Iran was 25,271.[174]

Communities exist in Tehran, as well as in Yazd, Kerman and Kermanshah, where many still speak an Iranian language distinct from the usual Persian. They call their language Dari, not to be confused with the Dari spoken in Afghanistan. Their language is also called Gavri or Behdini, literally "of the Good Religion". Sometimes their language is named for the cities in which it is spoken, such as Yazdi or Kermani. Iranian Zoroastrians were historically called Gabrs.[175]

The number of Kurdish Zoroastrians, along with those of non-ethnic converts, has been estimated differently.[176] The Zoroastrian Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq has reported that as many as 100,000 people in Iraqi Kurdistan have converted to Zoroastrianism recently, with some community leaders speculating that even more Zoroastrians in the region are practicing their faith secretly.[177] [178][179] However, this has not been confirmed by independent sources. [180] While, 2024 estimates showed a smaller figure of nearly 5,000 living in the region, primarily in Sulaymaniya Governorate of Iraq.[181]

The surge in Kurdish Muslims converting to Zoroastrianism is largely

attributed to disillusionment with Islam after experiencing violence and oppression perpetrated by ISIS in the area.[182]

South Asia

Main articles: Parsis and Irani (India)

Historical population of Parsis in India

Year Pop. ±% p.a.

1872	69,476	—
1881	85,397	+2.32%
1891	89,904	+0.52%
1901	94,190	+0.47%
1911	100,096	+0.61%
1921	101,778	+0.17%
1931	109,752	+0.76%
1941	114,890	+0.46%
1971	91,266	−0.76%
1981	71,630	−2.39%
2001	69,601	−0.14%
2011	57,264	−1.93%
2019	69,000	+2.36%

Sources:[183][184][185][186][187][188][189][190][191][192][193][194]

India is considered to be home to a large Zoroastrian population – the descendants of migrants from Iran and today known as the Parsis. In India's 2001 census, the Parsi population numbered at 69,601, representing about

0.006% of the total population of India, with a concentration in and around the city of Mumbai. By 2008, the birth-to-death ratio was 1:5; 200 births per year to 1,000 deaths.[195] India's 2011 census recorded 57,264 Parsi Zoroastrians.[193]

The Zoroastrian population in Pakistan was estimated to number 1,675 people in 2012,[167] mostly living in Sindh (especially Karachi) followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[196][197] The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) of Pakistan reported that there were 3,650 Parsi voters during the elections in Pakistan in 2013 and 4,235 in 2018.[198] According to the 2023 Pakistani census, there were 2,348 Parsis across the nation, with 1,656 (70.5%) being located in the Karachi Division.[199][200]

Western world

See also: Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America and Zoroastrianism in the United States

North America is thought to be home to 18,000–25,000 Zoroastrians of both South Asian and Iranian backgrounds. As of 2012, the population of Zoroastrians in US was 15,000, making it the third-largest Zoroastrian population in the world after those of India and Iran.[201] According to the 2021 Canadian census, the Zoroastrian Canadian population stood at 7,285, of which 3,630 were Parsis (of South Asian descent) and a further 2,390 of West Asian origin.[202] A further 3,500 live in Australia (mainly in Sydney). Stewart, Hinze & Williams write that 3,000 Kurds have converted to Zoroastrianism in Sweden.[203] According to the 2021 UK census, there were 4,105 Zoroastrians in England and Wales, of which 4,043 were in England. The majority (51%) of these (2,050) were in London, most notably the boroughs of Barnet, Harrow and Westminster. The remaining 49% of English Zoroastrians were scattered relatively evenly throughout the country, with the second and third largest concentrations being Birmingham (72) and Manchester (47).[204] In 2020, Historic England published A Survey of Zoroastrianism Buildings in England with the aim of providing information about buildings that Zoroastrians use in England so that HE can work with communities to enhance and protect those buildings now and in the future. The scoping survey identified four buildings in England.[205]

Relation to other religions and cultures

Map of the Achaemenid Empire in the 5th century BCE

Indo-Iranian origins

See also: Indo-Iranians and Proto-Indo-Iranian religion

The religion of Zoroastrianism is closest to historical Vedic religion to varying degrees.[clarification needed] Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism, along with similar philosophical revolutions in South Asia were interconnected strings of reformation of a common Indo-Aryan thread. Many traits of Zoroastrianism can be traced to prehistoric Indo-Iranian culture and beliefs, that is, before the migrations that separated the Indo-Aryans and Iranic peoples. Thus, Zoroastrianism shares elements with the historical Vedic religion that also originated in that era. Some examples include cognates between the Avestan word Ahura ("Ahura Mazda") and the Vedic Sanskrit word Asura ('demon', 'evil demigod'); as well as daeva ("demon") and deva ("god") and they both descend from a common Proto-Indo-Iranian religion.[citation needed]

Zoroastrianism inherited ideas from other belief systems and, like other "practiced" religions, contains syncretism.[206] Specifically, Zoroastrianism in Sogdia, the Kushan Empire, Armenia, China, and other places incorporates local and foreign practices and deities.[207]

Conversely, Zoroastrian influenced Hungarian, Slavic, Ossetian, Turkic and Mongol mythologies, all of which bear extensive light-dark dualisms and possible sun god theonyms related to Hvare-khshaeta.[208][209][210]

Abrahamic religions

Zoroastrianism is sometimes credited with being the first monotheistic

religion in history,[21] antedating that of the Israelites and leaving a lasting and profound imprint on Second Temple Judaism and, through it, on later monotheistic religions such as early Christianity and Islam.[25][211] There are clear commonalities and similarities between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity, such as: monotheism, dualism (i.e., a robust notion of a Devil—but with a positive appraisal of material creation), symbolism of the divine, heaven(s) and hell(s), angels and demons, eschatology and final judgment, a messianic figure and the idea of a savior, a holy spirit, concern with ritual purity, an idealization of wisdom and righteousness, and other doctrines, symbols, practices, and religious features.[212]

According to Mary Boyce, "Zoroaster was thus the first to teach the doctrines of an individual judgement, Heaven and Hell, the future resurrection of the body, the general last judgement, and life everlasting for the reunited soul and body. These doctrines were to become familiar articles of faith to much of mankind, through borrowing by Judaism, Christianity and Islam; yet it is in Zoroastrianism itself that they have their fullest logical coherence. Since Zoroaster insisted both on the goodness of material creation, and hence of the physical body, and on the unwavering impartiality of divine justice." [213]

The interactions between Judaism and Zoroastrianism resulted in transfer of religious ideas between the two religions and as a result, it is believed that Jews under Achaemenid rule were influenced by Zoroastrian angelology, demonology, eschatology, as well as Zoroastrian ideas about compensatory justice in life and after death.[214] It is also postulated that the Jewish high monotheistic concept of God developed during and after the period of the Babylonian captivity, when the Jews had a prolonged exposure to sophisticated Zoroastrian beliefs.[215]

In addition, Zoroastrian concepts seeded dualistic ideas in Jewish eschatology, such as the belief in a savior, the final battle between good and evil, the triumph of good and the resurrection of the dead. These ideas later passed on to Christianity via Zoroastrian-inspired texts of the Old Testament.[216]

According to some sources, such as The Jewish Encyclopedia (1906),[217] there exist many similarities between Zoroastrianism and Judaism. This has led some to propose that key Zoroastrian concepts influenced Judaism. However, other scholars disagree, finding that the general social influence of Zoroastrianism was much more limited, and that no link can be found in Jewish or Christian texts.[218]

Proponents of a link cite similarities between the two: such as dualism (good and evil, divine twins Ahura Mazda "God" and Angra Mainyu "Satan"), image of the deity, eschatology, resurrection and final judgment, messianism, revelation of Zoroaster on a mountain with Moses on Mount Sinai, three sons of Fereydun with three sons of Noah, heaven and hell, angelology and demonology, cosmology of six days or periods of creation, and free will, among others. Other scholars diminish or reject such influences,[219][220] [217][221][222][218] noting that "Zoroastrianism has a unique theistic doctrine which combines dualism, polytheism and pantheism", rather than being a monotheistic religion.[218] Others say "there is little concrete evidence about the precise origin and development of" Zoroastrianism,[223] and that "Zoroastrianism does not compare with the Jewish belief in the sovereignty of God over the whole of creation." [224]

Others, such as Lester L. Grabbe, have said "there is general agreement that Persian religion and tradition had its influence on Judaism over the centuries" and the "question is where this influence was and which of the developments in Judaism can be ascribed to the Iranian side as opposed to the effect of the Greek or other cultures".[220] There exist distinctions but also similarities between Zoroastrian and Jewish law regarding marriage and procreation.[225] While Mary Boyce claims, besides Abrahamic religions, Zoroastrian influence also extended to Northern Buddhism.[226]

Islam

Zoroastrians are considered to be a "People of the Book" by Muslims.[227]

Manichaeism

Zoroastrianism is often compared with Manichaeism. Nominally an Iranian religion, Manichaeism was heavily inspired by Zoroastrianism[228] because of Mani's Iranian origin, and it was also rooted in prior Middle-Eastern Gnostic beliefs.[219][226][220]

Manichaeism adopted many of the Yazatas for its own pantheon[229] Gherardo Gnoli, in The Encyclopaedia of Religion,[230] says that "we can assert that Manichaeism has its roots in the Iranian religious tradition and that its relationship to Mazdaism, or Zoroastrianism, is more or less like that of Christianity to Judaism".[231]

The two religions have substantial differences.[232]

Present-day Iran

Many aspects of Zoroastrianism are present in the culture and mythologies of the peoples of Greater Iran, not least because Zoroastrianism was a dominant influence on the people of the cultural continent for a thousand years. Even after the rise of Islam and the loss of direct influence, Zoroastrianism remained part of the cultural heritage of the Iranian language-speaking world, in part as festivals and customs, but also because Ferdowsi incorporated a number of the figures and stories from the Avesta in his epic Shāhnāme, which is pivotal to Iranian identity. One notable example is the incorporation of the Yazata Sraosha as an angel venerated within Shia Islam in Iran.[233]

See also

Mandaean cosmology

Proto-Indo-European mythology

Zurvan

References

Persian: دین زرتشتی Dīn-e Zartoshtī

Avestan: 𐬨𐬀𐬌𐬎𐬎𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬎 𐬨𐬀𐬎𐬎 Mazdaiiasna

Persian: بهدین behdīn

Citations

Boyd, James W.; Crosby, Donald A. (1979). "Is Zoroastrianism Dualistic or Monotheistic?". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. 47 (4): 557–88. doi:10.1093/jaarel/XLVII.4.557. ISSN 0002-7189. JSTOR 1462275. In brief, the interpretation we favor is that Zoroastrianism combines cosmogonic dualism and eschatological monotheism in a manner unique to itself among the major religions of the world. This combination results in a religious outlook which cannot be categorized as either straightforward dualism or straightforward monotheism, meaning that the question in the title of this paper poses a false dichotomy. The dichotomy arises, we contend, from a failure to take seriously enough the central role played by time in Zoroastrian theology. Zoroastrianism proclaims a movement through time from dualism toward monotheism, i.e., a dualism which is being made false by the dynamics of time, and a monotheism which is being made true by those same dynamics of time. The meaning of the eschaton in Zoroastrianism is thus the triumph of monotheism, the good God Ahura Mazdā having at last won his way through to complete and final ascendancy. But in the meantime there is vital truth to dualism, the neglect of which can only lead to a distortion of the religion's essential teachings.

Skjærvø 2005, pp. 14–15: Ahura Mazdā's companions include the six 'Life-giving Immortals' and great gods, such as Mithra, the sun god, and others [...]. The forces of evil comprise, notably, Angra Manyu, the Evil Spirit, the bad, old, gods (daêwas), and Wrath (aêshma), which probably embodies the dark night sky itself. Zoroastrianism is therefore a dualistic and polytheistic religion, but with one supreme god, who is the father of the ordered cosmos."

Skjærvø 2005, p. 15 with footnote 1.

Hintze 2014: "The religion thus seems to involve monotheistic, polytheistic and dualistic features simultaneously."

"Heard of Zoroastrianism? The ancient religion still has fervent followers". National Geographic. 6 July 2024. Retrieved 6 July 2024.

"Zoroastrianism". HISTORY. 5 June 2023. Retrieved 6 July 2024.

The Circle of Ancient Iranian Studies | IRANIAN COSMOGONY & DUALISM | By: Gherardo Gnoli.

"Avesta | Definition, Contents, & Facts | Britannica". www.britannica.com. Retrieved 6 July 2024.

"Spenta Mainyu | Ahura Mazda, Supreme Being, Zoroastrianism | Britannica". www.britannica.com. Retrieved 6 July 2024.

"Angra Mainyu | Definition & Facts | Britannica". www.britannica.com. Retrieved 6 July 2024.

The Moral and Ethical Teachings of the Ancient Zoroastrian Religion University of Chicago, pp. 58–59.

Masani, Sir Rustom. Zoroastrianism: The Religion of the Good Life. New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Schmitt, Rüdiger (20 July 2002). "Zoroaster i. The Name". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 16 January 2017. Retrieved 1 August 2019.

Boyce 1983.

Russell, James R. (15 December 1989). "Behdīn". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Vol. IV. Archived from the original on 5 October 2023. Retrieved 1 August 2019.

Karanjia, Ramiyar P. (14 August 2016). "Understanding Our Religious Titles". Parsi Times. Archived from the original on 21 March 2023. Retrieved 30 January 2021.

Browne, T. (1643) "Religio Medici"

"Mazdaism". Oxford Reference. Archived from the original on 28 February 2021. Retrieved 1 August 2019.

Berkey, Jonathan P. The formation of Islam: Religion and society in the Near East, 600–1800. Vol. 2. Cambridge University Press, 2003. p. 27

Nagasawa, Yujin (10 December 2019), "Panpsychism Versus Pantheism, Polytheism, and Cosmopsychism", The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism, Routledge, pp. 259–268, doi:10.4324/9781315717708-22, ISBN 978-1-315-71770-8

Sayem, Md. Abu (2011). "A Brief Historical Survey Of The Monotheistic Concept In Religious Belief". International Journal of History and Research. 1 (1): 33–44 – via ResearchGate.

Ferrero, Mario (2021). "From Polytheism to Monotheism: Zoroaster and Some Economic Theory". Homo Oeconomicus. 38 (1–4): 77–108. doi:10.1007/s41412-021-00113-4.

Foltz 2013, p. xiv.

Brian Arthur Brown (2016). Four Testaments: Tao Te Ching, Analects, Dhammapada, Bhagavad Gita: Sacred Scriptures of Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. pp. 347–349. ISBN 978-1-4422-6578-3.

Ferrero, Mario (2021). "From Polytheism to Monotheism: Zoroaster and Some Economic Theory". Homo Oeconomicus. 38 (1–4): 77–108. doi:10.1007/s41412-021-00113-4.

Hinnells, John; Williams, Alan (2007). Parsis in India and the Diaspora. Routledge. p. 165. ISBN 978-1-134-06752-7.

HINTZE, ALMUT (2014). "Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way". Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. 24 (2): 225–49. ISSN 1356-1863. JSTOR 43307294. Archived from the original on 22 April 2021. Retrieved 5 April 2021.

Mehr, Farhang (2003). The Zoroastrian Tradition: An Introduction to the Ancient Wisdom of Zarathushtra. Mazda Publishers. p. 44. ISBN 978-1-56859-110-0. Archived from the original on 31 March 2024. Retrieved 7 April 2021.

François Lenormant and E. Chevallier The Student's Manual of Oriental History: Medes and Persians, Phœnicians, and Arabians, p. 38

Constance E. Plumptre (2011). General Sketch of the History of Pantheism. Cambridge University Press. p. 81. ISBN 9781108028011. Retrieved 14 June

2017.

"AHURA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 2 September 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Boyce, Mary (1983), "Ahura Mazdā", Encyclopaedia Iranica, vol. 1, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 684–687, archived from the original on 17 May 2020, retrieved 13 July 2019

"Ahura Mazdā". Archived from the original on 16 July 2024. Retrieved 16 July 2024.

"(PDF) Zoroastrianism and the Bible: Monotheism by Coincidence? | Erhard Gerstenberger - Academia.edu". doi:10.1111/J.1749-8171.2011.00266.X. Archived from the original on 17 March 2024. Retrieved 17 March 2024.

Foundation, Encyclopaedia Iranica. "Mithra i – Encyclopaedia Iranica". iranicaonline.org. Retrieved 24 April 2024.

Büchner 1934, p. 1161.

Boyce 2001, p. xxi.

Geiger 1885, p. xlix.

Boyce 2001, p. 157.

Raffaelli, Enrico G. (16 June 2016). "The Amesha spentas and their helpers: The Zoroastrian ham-kars". Archived from the original on 17 March 2024. Retrieved 17 March 2024.

"GATHAS". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 30 June 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"DĒN". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 10 August 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"ZOROASTRIAN RITUALS". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 30 June 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"AŠA (Asha "Truth")". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 26 May 2020. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

"GĒTĪG AND MĒNŌG". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 24 June 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Druj". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 5 October 2023. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

"DARVĪŠ". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 May 2018. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"HUMATA HŪXTA HUVARŠTA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 5 October 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 23 July 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"WOMEN ii. In the Avesta". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 November 2017. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Cavendish, Richard; Ling, Trevor Oswald (1980), *Mythology: an Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Rizzoli, pp. 40–5, ISBN 978-0847802869

"FRAVAŠI". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Boyce 2001, p. 205.

"What Does Zoroastrianism Teach Us About Ecology?". Parliament of the World's Religions. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Foltz, Richard; Saadi-Nejad, Manya (2008). "Is Zoroastrianism an Ecological Religion?". *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*. 1 (4): 413–430. doi:10.1558/jsrnc.v1i4.413.

Foltz, Richard (2010). "Zoroastrian Attitudes toward Animals". *Society & Animals*. 18 (4): 367–78. doi:10.1163/156853010X524325.

"Interfaith Vegan Coalition: Zoroastrian Kit" (PDF). In *Defense of Animals*. Archived (PDF) from the original on 24 September 2022. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Goodstein, Laurie (6 September 2008). "Zoroastrians Keep the Faith, and Keep Dwindling". *The New York Times*. Archived from the original on 20

October 2023. Retrieved 3 October 2009.

Duchesne-Guillemain, Jacques (4 January 2024). "Zoroastrianism". Encyclopedia Britannica. Archived from the original on 22 January 2012. Retrieved 3 August 2013.

"AHRIMAN". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Boyce 1979, pp. 6–12.

"AMƏŠA SPƏNTA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Zoroastrianism: Holy text, beliefs and practices". Encyclopedia Iranica. 1 March 2010. Archived from the original on 5 December 2018. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

"AHUNWAR". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 29 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"FRAŠŌ.KƏRƏTI". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 5 October 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"ŠAHREWAR". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Panaino 2019, p. 58.

Panaino 2019, p. 9.

Panaino 2019, p. 85.

Panaino 1995, p. 205–208.

Panaino 2019, p. 72–73.

Panaino 2015, p. 238–240.

"ČINWAD PUHL". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Dadestan-i Denig ('Religious Decisions'): Chapters 1–41". Avesta. Archived

from the original on 31 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Lee Lawrence. (3 September 2011). "A Mysterious Stranger in China" Archived 5 December 2017 at the Wayback Machine. The Wall Street Journal. Accessed on 31 August 2016.

"Herodotus, The Histories, Book 1, chapter 131". Perseus Digital Library. Archived from the original on 27 February 2021. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"ĀTAŠKADA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 28 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Ajiri, Denise Hassanzade (11 April 2016). "Herbal life: traditional medicine gets a modern twist in Iran". The Guardian. ISSN 0261-3077. Archived from the original on 16 April 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Zoroastrian Rituals: Wedding". Avesta. Archived from the original on 21 May 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"ARDĀ WĪRĀZ". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 18 May 2022. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"KARTIR". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 25 June 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"BANG". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"MAGIC i. MAGICAL ELEMENTS IN THE AVESTA AND NĒRANG LITERATURE". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Frantz, Grenet (2022). Splendeurs des oasis d'Ouzbékistan. Paris: Louvre Editions. p. 159. ISBN 978-8412527858.

Robotika, Bettina; Sehgal, Ikram (3 December 2021). "Zoroastrianism — Parsi". Daily Times (Pakistan). Retrieved 29 May 2025.

"YASNA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"VISPERAD". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 2 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"VENDĪDĀD". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"SACRIFICE i. IN ZOROASTRIANISM". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 10 October 2017. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"KHORDEH AVESTĀ". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 4 August 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Zoroastrian rituals: Navjote/Sudre-Pooshi (initiation) ceremony". Avesta. Archived from the original on 25 October 2010. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"KUSTĪG". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 31 March 2024. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"GĀH". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 10 December 2022. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Festivals i. Zoroastrian". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 11 January 2012. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"YEŊHĒ HĀTAṂ". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"AŠĒM VOHŪ (Ashem vohu)". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"ČĀDOR (2)". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Kellens, Jeana. "AVESTA i. Survey of the history and contents of the book". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Vol. 3. New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul. pp. 35–44. Archived from the original on 22 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Burger, Michael (January 2013). The Shaping of Western Civilization: From Antiquity to the Present. University of Toronto Press. p. 20. ISBN 9781442601901.

"ALEXANDER THE GREAT ii. In Zoroastrianism – Encyclopaedia Iranica". iranicaonline.org. Archived from the original on 18 November 2020. Retrieved 30 January 2021.

Curtis, Vesta Sarkhosh (2016). "Ancient Iranian Motifs and Zoroastrian

Iconography". In Alan Williams; Sarah Stewart; Almut Hintze (eds.). *The Zoroastrian Flame. Exploring Religion, History and Tradition*. I.B. Tauris. Archived from the original on 24 June 2021. Retrieved 30 January 2021.

"Greece iii. Persian Influence on Greek Thought". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 19 May 2023. Retrieved 14 July 2019.

"Is The Vandidad a Zarathushtrian Scripture?". *English Zoroastrian*. Archived from the original on 7 August 2014. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Bromiley, Geoffrey W. (1979). *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Volume III: K-P*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing. p. 124. ISBN 978-0-8028-3783-7. Archived from the original on 31 March 2024. Retrieved 6 November 2022.

Boyce 2001, p. 26.

"ZOROASTER". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 29 November 2021. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"HAOMA". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 1 August 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Boyce 2001, p. 19.

"DAIVA". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Boyce 2001, p. 30–31.

"The Destruction of Sacred Trees". *www.goldenassay.com*. 17 July 2012. Archived from the original on 6 March 2021. Retrieved 6 February 2020.

"The Cypress of Kashmar and Zoroaster". *www.zoroastrian.org.uk*. Archived from the original on 20 May 2019. Retrieved 6 February 2020.

"تاریخچه و نقشه جامع شهر کاشمر در ویکی آنا". *ana.press*. Archived from the original on 26 October 2020. Retrieved 27 October 2020.

"ترشیز؛ دروازه ورود اسلام به خراسان". *khurasan.iqna.ir*. Archived from the original on 6 June 2020. Retrieved 11 October 2020.

Foltz 2013, pp. 10–18.

"Zarathustra – Iranian prophet". Archived from the original on 11 October 2016. Retrieved 9 June 2017.

"ZOROASTRIANISM i. HISTORY TO THE ARAB CONQUEST – Encyclopaedia Iranica". Encyclopædia Iranica. Archived from the original on 5 December 2018. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Malandra, William W. (2009). "Zoroaster ii. general survey". Encyclopædia Iranica. Iranica Foundation. Archived from the original on 17 May 2023. Retrieved 6 May 2023. Controversy over Zoroaster's date has been an embarrassment of long standing to Zoroastrian studies. If anything approaching a consensus exists, it is that he lived ca. 1000 BCE give or take a century or so, though reputable scholars have proposed dates as widely apart as ca.1750 BCE and "258 years before Alexander.

Boyce, Mary (1996). A History Of Zoroastrianism: The Early Period. Brill. p. 3.

Daniel, Elton L. (2012). The History of Iran. Greenwood. p. 47. ISBN 978-0313375095. Recent research, however, has cast considerable doubt on this dating and geographical setting. [...] The similarity of the language and metrical system of the Gathas to those of the Vedas, the simplicity of the society depicted throughout the Avesta, and the lack of awareness of great cities, historical rulers, or empires all suggest a different time frame. [...] All in all, it seems likely that Zoroaster and the Avestan people flourished in eastern Iran at a much earlier date (anywhere from 1500 to 900 B.C.) than once thought.

Patrick Karl O'Brien, ed. Atlas&pg=PA45 of World History Archived 21 March 2023 at the Wayback Machine, concise edn. (NY: Oxford UP, 2002), 45.

Vogelsang, Wilhelm (2000). "The sixteen lands of Videvdāt – Airyanem Vaejah and the homeland of the Iranians". Persica. 16: 9. doi:10.2143/PERS.16.0.511. The land of Airyanem Vaejah, which is described in the text as a land of extreme cold, has often been identified with ancient Choresmia.

Witzel, Michael (2000). "The Home of the Aryans". In Hinze, A.; Tichy, E. (eds.). Festschrift für Johanna Narten zum 70. Geburtstag (PDF). J. H. Roell. pp. 283–338. doi:10.11588/xarep.00000114. Archived (PDF) from the original on 13 October 2022. Retrieved 6 May 2023. Since the evidence of Young

Avestan place names so clearly points to a more eastern location, the Avesta is again understood, nowadays, as an East Iranian text, whose area of composition comprised -- at least -- Sīstān/Arachosia, Herat, Merw and Bactria.

Skjaervø, P. Oktor (1995). "The Avesta as source for the early history of the Iranians". In Erdosy, George (ed.). *The Indo-Aryans of Ancient South Asia*. De Gruyter. p. 166. ISBN 9783110144475. The fact that the oldest Young Avestan texts apparently contain no reference to western Iran, including Media, would seem to indicate that they were composed in eastern Iran before the Median domination reached the area.

Litvinskij, B. A.; Pichikian, I. R. (1994). "The Hellenistic Architecture and Art of the Temple of the Oxus". *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*. 8. Asia Institute: 47–66. ISSN 0890-4464. JSTOR 24048765.

"Herodotus, The Histories, Book 1, chapter 140". *Perseus Digital Library*. Archived from the original on 30 December 2022. Retrieved 21 March 2021.

"Herodotus, The Histories, Book 3, chapter 67, section 3". *Perseus Digital Library*. Archived from the original on 3 August 2023. Retrieved 3 August 2019.

Sala, Joan Cortada I. (1867), *Resumen de la Historia Universal: escrito con su conocimiento, y aprobado ...* – Joan Cortada i Sala, retrieved 7 November 2012 – via Google Libros

"BISOTUN iii. Darius's Inscriptions". *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 21 September 2023. Retrieved 3 August 2019.

Siculus, Diodorus. *Bibliotheca Historica*. pp. 17.72.2–6.

Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). "Persepolis" . *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Vol. 21 (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press. p. 186.

"ALEXANDER THE GREAT ii. In Zoroastrianism – Encyclopædia Iranica". *Encyclopædia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 18 May 2023. Retrieved 3 August 2019.

Boyce 2001, p. 85.

Frantz, Grenet (2022). *Splendeurs des oasis d'Ouzbékistan*. Paris: Louvre

Editions. p. 157. ISBN 978-8412527858.

Boyce 2001, p. 84.

Wigram, W. A. (2004), *An Introduction to the History of the Assyrian Church, or, The Church of the Sassanid Persian Empire, 100–640 A.D*, Gorgias Press, p. 34, ISBN 978-1593331030

Dr Stephen H Rapp Jr. *The Sasanian World through Georgian Eyes: Caucasia and the Iranian Commonwealth in Late Antique Georgian Literature* Archived 4 April 2023 at the Wayback Machine Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 28 September 2014. ISBN 1472425529, p. 160

Ronald Grigor Suny. *The Making of the Georgian Nation* Archived 7 April 2023 at the Wayback Machine Indiana University Press, 1994, ISBN 0253209153, p. 22

Roger Rosen, Jeffrey Jay Foxx. *The Georgian Republic, Volume 1992* Archived 7 April 2023 at the Wayback Machine Passport Books, 1992 p. 34

Hourani 1947, p. 87.

Boyce 1979, p. 150.

Boyce 1979, p. 146.

(Abu Bakr, qtd. in Boyce 1979, p. 146).

Boyce 1979, p. 158.

"Kamar Oniah Kamaruzzaman, *Al-Biruni: Father of Comparative Religion*". Lib.iiium.edu.my. Archived from the original on 13 July 2015. Retrieved 9 June 2017.

Bulliet 1979, pp. 37, 138.

Boyce 1979, pp. 147.

Bulliet 1979, p. 59.

Boyce 1979, p. 151.

Boyce 1979, p. 152.

Boyce 1979, p. 163.

Boyce 1979, p. 157.

Shastri, Padmaja (21 March 2004). "What sets Zoroastrian Iranis apart". 21 March 2004. Times of India. Archived from the original on 19 April 2020. Retrieved 12 October 2021.

Boyce 1979, p. 175.

Skjærvø 2005.

"CONVERSION vii. Zoroastrian faith in mod. per.". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 21 February 2018. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

Stausberg, Michael (2007). "Para-Zoroastrianisms: Memetic transmissions and appropriations". In Hinnels, John; Williams, John (eds.). Parsis in India and their Diasporas. London: Routledge. pp. 236–54.

<https://www.ronperrier.net/2019/10/18/iran-zoroastrianism/>

"They Helped Build Modern India But Are Shrinking As A Race". Forbes India. Archived from the original on 22 December 2023. Retrieved 22 December 2023.

"The journey of India's Parsi business community". www.timesnownews.com. 11 November 2020. Archived from the original on 22 December 2023. Retrieved 22 December 2023.

Writer, Rashna (1994). Contemporary Zoroastrians: An Unstructured Nation. University Press of America. p. 146. ISBN 978-0-8191-9142-7.

Anne Sofie Roald, Anh Nga Longva. Religious Minorities in the Middle East: Domination, Self-Empowerment, Accommodation Archived 20 April 2023 at the Wayback Machine Brill, 2011, ISBN 9004216847, p. 313

"The Jury Is Still Out On Women as Parsi Priests". Parsi Khabar. 9 March 2011. Archived from the original on 14 October 2013. Retrieved 12 October 2013.

"A group of 8 Zartoshti women received their Mobedyar Certificate from Anjoman Mobedan in Iran". Amordad6485.blogfa.com. Archived from the original on 27 September 2013. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

"Sedreh Pooshi by Female Mobedyar in Toronto Canada". Parsinews.net. 19 June 2013. Archived from the original on 9 October 2014. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

"گزارش تصویری-موبدیاران بانوی زرتشتی، به جرگه موبدیاران پیوستند (بخش نخست)". Archived from the original on 27 September 2013. Retrieved 10 August 2013.

Rivetna, Roshan. "The Zarathushti World, a 2012 Demographic Picture" (PDF). Fezana.org. Archived (PDF) from the original on 16 August 2017. Retrieved 2 August 2019.

"Zoroastrianism". 5 June 2023. Archived from the original on 11 March 2023. Retrieved 3 August 2023.

"Zoroastrians Keep the Faith, and Keep Dwindling". Laurie Goodstein. 6 September 2006. Archived from the original on 20 October 2023. Retrieved 25 September 2017.

Deena Guzder (9 December 2008). "The Last of the Zoroastrians". Time. Archived from the original on 5 June 2019. Retrieved 25 September 2017.

"Disenchanted Iranians are turning to other faiths". The Economist. Archived from the original on 11 August 2023. Retrieved 10 June 2023.

K. E. Eduljee (28 June 2008). "Zoroastrian Demographics & Group Names". Heritageinstitute.com. Archived from the original on 1 August 2017. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

U.S. State Department (26 October 2009). "Iran – International Religious Freedom Report 2009". The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affair. Archived from the original on 29 October 2009. Retrieved 1 December 2009.

"Census: Iran young, urbanised and educated". Egypt Independent. 29 July 2012. Archived from the original on 2 December 2014. Retrieved 14 June 2017.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gabars>

Fatah, Lara (26 November 2015). "The curious rebirth of Zoroastrianism in Iraqi Kurdistan". Projects21.org. Archived from the original on 17 April 2017. Retrieved 27 February 2018.

"Hamazor Issue #2 2017: "Kurdistan reclaims its ancient Zoroastrian Faith" (PDF). Hamazor. Archived from the original (PDF) on 30 September 2017. Retrieved 3 August 2019.

"Zoroastrian faith returns to Kurdistan in response to ISIS violence". Rudaw. 2 June 2015. Archived from the original on 25 August 2017. Retrieved 17 May 2016.

"Kurdistan, the only government in Middle East that recognizes religious diversity". Kurdistan24. Archived from the original on 13 July 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

"Zoroastrian faith returns to Kurdistan in response to ISIL violence". Rudaw. Archived from the original on 25 August 2017. Retrieved 18 September 2015.

<https://shafaq.com/en/Kurdistan/Kurdistan-celebrates-birth-of-Zoroaster>

"Iraqi Kurds turn to Zoroastrianism as faith, identity entwine". France24. 23 October 2019. Archived from the original on 13 April 2020. Retrieved 22 October 2023.

Waterfield, Henry; Great Britain India Office Statistics AND Commerce Department (1872). "Memorandum on the census of British India of 1871–72". pp. 50–54. JSTOR [saoa.crl.25057647](#). Retrieved 20 May 2024.

"Report on the census of British India, taken on the 17th February 1881 ..., Vol. 2". 1881. pp. 9–18. JSTOR [saoa.crl.25057654](#). Retrieved 20 May 2024.

Baines, Jervoise Athelstane; India Census Commissioner (1891). "Census of India, 1891. General tables for British provinces and feudatory states". pp. 87–95. JSTOR [saoa.crl.25318666](#). Retrieved 20 May 2024.

Frazer, R.W. (1897). British India. The story of nations. G. P. Putnam's sons. p. 355. Archived from the original on 8 May 2023. Retrieved 8 May 2023.

"Census of India 1901. Vol. 1A, India. Pt. 2, Tables". 1901. pp. 57–62. JSTOR [saoa.crl.25352838](#). Retrieved 20 May 2024.

Edward Albert Gait, Sir; India Census Commissioner (1911). "Census of India, 1911. Vol. 1., Pt. 2, Tables". Calcutta, Supt. Govt. Print., India, 1913. pp. 37–42. JSTOR [saoa.crl.25393779](#). Retrieved 20 May 2024.

"Census of India 1921. Vol. 1, India. Pt. 2, Tables". 1921. pp. 39–44. JSTOR saoa.crl.25394121. Retrieved 20 May 2024.

United States Department of Commerce (1924). Trade and Economic Review for 1922 No.34 (Supplement to Commerce Reports ed.). Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce. p. 46. Archived from the original on 13 May 2023. Retrieved 8 May 2023.

"Census of India 1931. Vol. 1, India. Pt. 2, Imperial tables". 1931. pp. 513–519. JSTOR saoa.crl.25793234. Retrieved 20 May 2024.

India Census Commissioner (1941). "Census of India, 1941. Vol. 1, India". pp. 97–101. JSTOR saoa.crl.28215532. Retrieved 20 May 2024.

"Parsi population dips by 22 per cent between 2001–2011: study". The Hindu. 26 July 2016. Archived from the original on 6 January 2019. Retrieved 3 November 2021.

"The last of the Zoroastrians". the Guardian. 6 August 2020. Archived from the original on 27 November 2021. Retrieved 16 November 2021.

"Doomed by faith", The Independent, 28 June 2008, archived from the original on 7 May 2022, retrieved 28 June 2008

"The Parsi Community in Karachi, Pakistan". Public Radio International. 15 August 2013. Archived from the original on 7 February 2015. Retrieved 7 February 2015.

Khan, Iftikhar A. (28 May 2018). "Number of non-Muslim voters in Pakistan shows rise of over 30pc". Dawn. Archived from the original on 4 June 2018. Retrieved 12 September 2019.

"Over 35,000 Buddhists, Bahá'ís call Pakistan home". The Express Tribune. 2 September 2012. Archived from the original on 2 November 2012. Retrieved 12 September 2019.

"TABLE 9 : POPULATION BY SEX, RELIGION AND RURAL/URBAN, CENSUS – 2023" (PDF). Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. 2023. Retrieved 2 August 2024.

"TABLE 9 : POPULATION BY SEX, RELIGION AND RURAL/URBAN, CENSUS – 2023" (PDF). Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. 2023. Retrieved 2 August 2024.

NIAC inSight, Washington insights for the Iranian-American community from the National Iranian American Council (16 December 2016). "An Old Faith in the New World – Zoroastrianism in the United States". NIAC inSight. Archived from the original on 5 August 2020. Retrieved 26 August 2018.

Government of Canada, Statistics Canada (26 October 2022). "Religion by visible minority and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts". www12.statcan.gc.ca. Archived from the original on 5 March 2023. Retrieved 26 November 2023.

Stewart, Sarah; Hintze, Almut; Williams, Alan (2016). The Zoroastrian Flame: Exploring Religion, History and Tradition. London: I.B Tauris. ISBN 9781784536336.

"Religion, England and Wales – Office for National Statistics". www.ons.gov.uk. Archived from the original on 29 November 2022. Retrieved 29 December 2022.

Tomalin, Emma (2020). "A Survey of Zoroastrianism Buildings in England. Historic England Research Report 203/2020". research.historicengland.org.uk. Archived from the original on 16 June 2020. Retrieved 16 June 2020.

e.g., Boyce 1982, p. 202.

The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. John Wiley & Sons. 2015. pp. 83–191. ISBN 9781444331356.

Š. Kulišić; P.Ž. Petrović; N. Pantelić. "Бели бог". Српски митолошки речник (in Serbian). Belgrade: Nolit. pp. 21–22.

Juha Pentikäinen, Walter de Gruyter, Shamanism and Northern Ecology 11 July 2011

Diószegi, Vilmos (1998) [1958]. A sámánhit emlékei a magyar népi műveltségben (in Hungarian) (1. reprint kiadás ed.). Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó. ISBN 963-05-7542-6. The title means: "Remnants of shamanistic beliefs in Hungarian folklore".

"Zoroastrianism | Definition, Beliefs, Founder, Holy Book, & Facts | Britannica". Archived from the original on 8 April 2023. Retrieved 1 March

2024.

Fredrickson, Nathan (January 2009). "Zoroastrian Influence on Post-Exilic Jewish Belief and Practice". Archived from the original on 25 February 2024. Retrieved 6 March 2024.

Boyce, Mary (2000). Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices. Routledge. p. 50.

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1985). History of Zoroastrianism. K.R. Cama Oriental Institute. p. 24,198.

Patchell, Herbert Sidney (1965). "The impact of Zoroastrianism upon Judaism and Christianity". Archived from the original on 26 February 2024. Retrieved 26 February 2024.

Kuehn, Sara. "Kuehn, S., "The Dragon Fighter: The Influence of Zoroastrian Ideas on Judaeo-Christian and Islamic Iconography," in: Zoroastrianism in the Levant, ARAM Society for Syro-Mesopotamian Studies 26, 1/2 (2014), 65–101".

Kaufmann Kohler; A. V. Williams Jackson (1906). "Zoroastrianism ("Resemblances Between Zoroastrianism and Judaism" and "Causes of Analogies Uncertain")". The Jewish Encyclopaedia. Archived from the original on 7 February 2022. Retrieved 3 February 2022.

Basile, Cam (1 January 2021). "Zoroastrian Influence on Old Testament Monotheism and Eschatology? A Scriptural and Sociological Analysis". Zoroastrian Influence on Old Testament Monotheism and Eschatology? A Scriptural and Sociological Analysis. Archived from the original on 25 February 2024. Retrieved 26 February 2024.

Nigosian, Solomon Alexander (1993). Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research. McGill-Queen's Press. pp. 95–97, 131. ISBN 9780773511330.

Grabbe, Lester L. (2006). A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period (vol. 1): The Persian Period (539-331BCE). Bloomsbury Publishing. pp. 361–364. ISBN 9780567216175. Archived from the original on 31 March 2024. Retrieved 3 February 2022.

Black & Rowley 1982, p. 607b.

Duchesne-Guillemin 1988, p. 815.

Nigosian, Solomon Alexander (1993). *Zoroastrian Faith: Tradition and Modern Research*. McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP. ISBN 978-0-7735-1133-0. Archived from the original on 26 February 2024. Retrieved 26 February 2024.

Grabbe, Lester L. (27 July 2006). *A History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period (vol. 1): The Persian Period (539-331BCE)*. Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 978-0-567-21617-5. Archived from the original on 26 February 2024. Retrieved 26 February 2024.

Weisberg, Dvora E. (2000). "The Babylonian Talmud's Treatment of Levirate Marriage". *The Annual of Rabbinic Judaism: Ancient, Medieval, and Modern*. BRILL. pp. 63–65. ISBN 9789004118935. Archived from the original on 3 February 2022. Retrieved 3 February 2022.

Boyce 2001, p. 1, 77.

"Ahl al-Kitāb". *Britannica*. 2 June 2016. Retrieved 10 June 2024.

<https://almuslih.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Beduhn-J-The-Co-formation-of-Manichaeism-and-Zoroastrianism.pdf>

[https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Miscellaneous_Philosophy_Topics/South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_\(Levin_et_al.\)/02%3A_Hindu-based_Philosophy_and_Jainism/2.09%3A_Other_Asian_Religions_and_their_Philosophies-_Sikhism_and_Zoroastrianism](https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Philosophy/Miscellaneous_Philosophy_Topics/South_and_East_Asian_Philosophy_Reader_(Levin_et_al.)/02%3A_Hindu-based_Philosophy_and_Jainism/2.09%3A_Other_Asian_Religions_and_their_Philosophies-_Sikhism_and_Zoroastrianism)

Gherardo Gnoli, "Manichaeism: An Overview", in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (NY: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1987), 9: 165.

Contrast with Henning's observations: Henning, W.B., *The Book of Giants*, BSOAS, Vol. XI, Part 1, 1943, pp. 52–74:

It is noteworthy that Mani, who was brought up and spent most of his life in a province of the Persian empire, and whose mother belonged to a famous Parthian family, did not make any use of the Iranian mythological tradition. There can no longer be any doubt that the Iranian names of Sām, Narīmān, etc., that appear in the Persian and Sogdian versions of the Book of the Giants, did not figure in the original edition, written by Mani in the Syriac

language

Zaehner 1961, pp. 53–54.

"SRAOŠA". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Archived from the original on 1 August 2019. Retrieved 13 July 2019.

Works cited

Black, Matthew; Rowley, H. H., eds. (1982), Peake's Commentary on the Bible, New York: Nelson, ISBN 978-0-415-05147-7

Boyce, Mary (1979), Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, London: Routledge, ISBN 978-0-415-23903-5 (note to catalogue searchers: the spine of this edition misprints the title "Zoroastrians" as "Zoroastians", and this may lead to catalogue errors; there is a second edition published in 2001 with the same ISBN)

Boyce, Mary (1982), The History of Zoroastrianism, vol. 2, Leiden: Brill, ISBN 978-90-04-06506-2

Boyce, Mary (2001). Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0415239028.

Büchner, V. F. (1934), "Yazdān", in Houtsma, Martijn Theodor (ed.), Encyclopedia of Islam, vol. IV (1st ed.), Leyden: Brill.

Bulliet, Richard W. (1979), Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: An Essay in Quantitative History, Cambridge: Harvard UP, ISBN 978-0-674-17035-3

Duchesne-Guillemin, Jacques (1988), "Zoroastrianism", Encyclopedia Americana, vol. 29, Danbury: Grolier pp. 813–815

Foltz, Richard (2013), Religions of Iran: From Prehistory to the Present, London: Oneworld publications, ISBN 978-1-78074-308-0

Geiger, Wilhelm (1885), Civilization of the Eastern Iranians in Ancient Times, Oxford: OUP/H. Frowde

Hintze, Almut (2014), "Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way" (PDF), Journal of

the Royal Asiatic Society, 24 (2): 225–49, doi:10.1017/S1356186313000333

Hourani, Albert (1947), *Minorities in the Arab World*, New York: AMS Press

Panaino, Antonio (1995). "Uranographia Iranica I. The Three Heavens in the Zoroastrian Tradition and the Mesopotamian Background". In Gyselen, R. (ed.). *Au carrefour des religions. Mélanges offerts à Philippe Gignoux*. Peeters. pp. 205–225.

Panaino, Antonio (2015). "The Classification of Astral Bodies in the framework of an Historical Survey of Iranian traditions". In Bläsing, U.; Arakelova, V. (eds.). *Studies on Iran and The Caucasus in Honour of Garnik Asatrian*. Brill. pp. 229–244. doi:10.1163/9789004302068_016. ISBN 978-90-04-30201-3.

Panaino, Antonio C.D. (2019). *A Walk through the Iranian Heavens: Spherical and Non-Spherical Cosmographic Models in the Imagination of Ancient Iran and Its Neighbors*. Brill.

Skjærvø, Prods Oktor (2005), "Introduction to Zoroastrianism" (PDF), *Iranian Studies at Harvard University*, archived from the original (PDF) on 24 December 2021, retrieved 13 July 2019

Zaehner, Robert Charles (1961), *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*, London: Phoenix Press, ISBN 978-1-84212-165-8

Further reading

Boyce, Mary (1975). *The History of Zoroastrianism*. Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill. ISBN 978-90-04-10474-7.

Boyce, Mary (1984). *Textual sources for the study of Zoroastrianism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN 978-0-226-06930-2.

Boyce, Mary (1987). *Zoroastrianism: A Shadowy but Powerful Presence in the Judaeo-Christian World*. London: William's Trust.[ISBN missing]

Boyce, Mary (1991). *The History of Zoroastrianism*. Vol. 3. Leiden: Brill. ISBN 978-90-04-09271-6.

Clark, Peter (1998). *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction to an Ancient Faith*. Brighton: Sussex Academic Press. ISBN 978-1-898723-78-3.

Dastur, Francoise (1996). *Death: An Essay on Finitude*. A&C Black. ISBN 978-0-485-11487-4.

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1938). *History of Zoroastrianism*. New York: Oxford University Press.[ISBN missing]

Eliade, Mircea; Couliano, Ioan P. (1991). *The Eliade Guide to World Religions*. New York: Harper Collins.[ISBN missing]

Kment, Petr (February 2018). "Zoroastrian tradition at Mangyshlak: underground mosque Shakpak-Ata". *Kulturní studia / Cultural Studies*. 6 (11). ISSN 2336-2766. Archived from the original on 10 December 2022.

Malandra, William W. (1983). *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and Achaemenid Inscriptions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. ISBN 978-0-8166-1114-0.

Malandra, William W. "ZOROASTRIANISM i. HISTORICAL REVIEW UP TO THE ARAB CONQUEST". *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. Archived from the original on 5 December 2017. Retrieved 17 September 2012.

Moulton, James Hope (1917). *The Treasure of the Magi: A Study of Modern Zoroastrianism*. London: Oxford University Press. ISBN 1-564-59612-5.

Rose, J. (2000). *The Image of Zoroaster: The Persian Mage Through European Eyes*. Persian Studies Series. Bibliotheca Persica Press. ISBN 978-0-933273-45-0.

Rose, J. (2011). *Zoroastrianism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury Publishing. ISBN 978-1-4411-4950-3.

Rose, J. (2014). *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. I. B.Tauris. ISBN 978-0-85773-548-5.

Russell, James R. (1987). *Zoroastrianism in Armenia*. Harvard Iranian Series. Oxford: Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-674-96850-9.

Skjærvø, Prods Oktor, ed. (2011). *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*. Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-17035-1.

Schmidt, Francis (1987). *The Inconceivable Polytheism: Studies in Religious Historiography*. Harwood Academic. pp. 217–219. ISBN 978-3-7186-0367-1.

Stoyanov, Y. (2000). The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy. Yale University Press. ISBN 978-0-300-19014-4.

The Chronicle of World History. Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky. 2008. ISBN 978-1-56852-680-5. OCLC 298782520.

Zeini, A. (2020). Zoroastrian Scholasticism in Late Antiquity: The Pahlavi Version of the Yasna HaptaA Haiti. Edinburgh University Press. ISBN 978-1-4744-4291-6.

External links

Zoroastrianism

at Wikipedia's sister projects

Definitions from Wiktionary

Media from Commons

Quotations from Wikiquote

Texts from Wikisource

Data from Wikidata

Zoroastrianism, BBC Radio 4 discussion with Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis, Farrokh Vajifdar & Alan Williams (In Our Time, 11 November 2004)

FEZANA – Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America

vte

Zoroastrian-Iranian calendar

vte

Zoroastrianism

vte

Atash Behram fire temples

vte

Zoroastrian literature

vte

Religion

Portals:

icon Religion

icon Asia

flag Iran

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: ZoroastrianismIndian religionsIranian religionsEthnic groups in the Middle EastReligion in IndiaReligion in IranReligion in KurdistanReligion in the Sasanian EmpireMonotheistic religionsEthnoreligious groups

This page was last edited on 24 November 2025, at 08:36 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Amesha Spenta

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

vte

The expression Amesha Spenta does not occur in the Gathas, but "it was probably coined by Zoroaster himself. Spenta is a characteristic word of his revelation, meaning furthering, strengthening, bounteous, holy." [1][a] The oldest attested [3] use of the term is in part of the Yasna Haptanghaiti [4] and in which the two elements of the name occur in reverse order, that is, as Spenta Amesha. Like all other verses of the Yasna Haptanghaiti, Yasna 39.3 is also in Gathic Avestan and is approximately as old as the hymns attributed to Zoroaster himself.

Amesha Spenta in the Gathas[5]

[illegible]

Spəṇṭa Mainyu (𐬰𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬌 𐬨𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬎𐬵𐬀)[6] Holy/Creative Spirit/Mentality

[Vohu] Manah ([𐬨𐬀𐬮𐬀𐬰] 𐬨𐬀𐬮𐬀𐬰) [Good] Purpose

Aša [Vahišta] ([𐬀𐬵𐬎𐬌𐬭𐬀] 𐬔𐬊𐬯𐬭𐬀) [Best] Truth / Righteousness

Xšaθra [Vairya] ([𐬰𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬵𐬀] 𐬰𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬵𐬀) [Desirable] Dominion

[Spənta] Ārmaiti ([𐬨𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬌𐬎𐬭𐬀] 𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬎𐬌𐬌𐬎𐬭𐬀) [Holy] Devotion

Haurvatāt (𐎱𐎠𐎼𐎿𐎡𐏁𐎧𐎺𐎠𐎹)	Wholeness
-------------------------------	------------------

Amərətāt (𐎠𐎼𐎷𐎡𐎴) Immortality

The attributes vohu "good", vahišta "best", vairyā "desirable" and spenta "holy" are not always present in the oldest texts. If they appear at all, they do not necessarily appear immediately adjacent to the noun.[b] But in later tradition, these adjectives are integral to the names themselves.

While Vohu Manah, Aša Vahišta, and Xšaθra Vairya are consistently of neuter gender in Avestan grammar; in tradition they are considered masculine. Armaiti, Haurvatāt, and Amərətāt are invariably feminine.

In the Gathas, each Amesha Spenta represents a good moral quality that mortals should strive to obtain. Thus, the doctrine of the great seven is that through good thoughts, words, and deeds, each individual should endeavor to assimilate the qualities of an Amesha Spenta into oneself.

Each of the seven has an antithetical counterpart, and five of the seven are already assigned one in the Gathas:[7] aša/arta- (truth) is opposed to the druj- (deceit, lies), spənta-mainyu to angra-mainyu, vohu-manah is opposed to aka-manah-, xšaθra- to dušae-xšaθra-, and armaiti- to taraemaiti-. Not evident in the Gathas and first appearing in the Younger Avesta[8] are the

oppositions of haurvatāt- (wholeness) to taršna- (thirst), and amərətāt- (life) to šud- (hunger). These latter assignments reflect Haurvatat's identification with water and Ameretat's identification with plants.

In the Gathas, aša/arta is the most evident of the seven, and also the most commonly associated with wisdom (mazda-). In the 238 verses of these hymns, aša-/arta- appears 157 times. Of the other concepts, only vohumanah- appears nearly as often (136 occurrences). In comparison, the remaining four of the great sextet appear only 121 times altogether: xšaθra-: 56 times; armaiti-: 40; amərətāt-: 14; haurvatāt-: 11 times.[7]

In the context of Zoroastrian cosmology, the group of the Amesha Spenta is extended to include Ahura Mazda, represented by (or together with) Spenta Mainyu, who is the instrument or "active principle" of the act of creation.[9] [10] It is also through this "Bounteous Force", "Creative Emanation", or "Holy Spirit" that Ahura Mazda is immanent in humankind,[11] and how the Creator interacts with the world.[12]

The doctrine also has a physical dimension, in that each of the heptad is linked to one of the seven creations, which in ancient philosophy were the foundation of the universe. A systematic association is only present in later Middle Persian texts, where each of the seven is listed with its "special domain":[1][9]

Systematic associations in later Persian texts

Gathic name	Middle Persian	New Persian	Systematic association
Spənta Mainyu			of humans and guardian of all
Vohu Manah	Wahman	Bahman	of cattle (and all animals)
Aša Vahišta	Ardwahišt	Urdibihišt	of fire (and all other luminaries)

Xšaθra Vairya Šahrewar Šahrivar of metals (and minerals)

Spənta Ārmaiti Spandarmad Esfand/Espand of earth

Haurvatāt Hordād Xurdād of water

Amərətāt Amurdād Murdād of plants

In the Gathas, Xšaθra [Vairya] does not have an association with a specific creation, and it is only in later texts that this Amesha Spenta is considered the guardian of metals. This anomaly is explained in modern scholarship by the fact that, in Stone Age cosmogony, the sky was considered to be the first of the creations (and thought to be of stone), but metal has no place among the creations (the Bronze and Iron Ages were yet to come). This is also reflected in Zoroaster's revelation, where the sky is "of the hardest stone". [13] Later, with the advent of bronze and then iron tools, this sky evolved to being of crystal, which was seen as both a stone and a metal.[14] In due course, Xšaθra's association with a stony firmament was eclipsed by the association with a metallic sky, and thence to metals in general.

In non-specific usage

In non-specific usage, the term Amesha Spenta denotes all the divinities that furthered or strengthened creation and all that are bounteous and holy. It not only includes the Ahuras (a term that in the Gathas is also used in the plural but only includes Ahura Mazda by name), but also all the other divinities that are alluded to in these texts. In this non-specific sense of the term, Amesha Spenta is then equivalent to the term yazata.

Non-specific usage is significantly less common than the use of the term to specifically denote the great divine entities (see above). The non-specific usage is particularly evident in the 9th-14th century texts of Zoroastrian tradition, but there are also instances in the Avesta proper where it is used this way. In Yasna 1.2 for instance, the yazata Atar is declared to be "the most active of the Amesha Spentas." Even in present-day Zoroastrianism, the term is frequently used to refer to the thirty-three divinities that have either a day-name dedication in the Zoroastrian calendar or that have a Yasht dedicated to them (or both).

This general, non-specific, meaning of the term Amesha Spenta also has an equivalent in the Vedic Sanskrit Vishve Amrtas, which is the collective term for all supernatural beings (lit: 'all immortals').

Doctrine

The doctrine of the Amesha Spenta, through their connection with creation, unites ethereal and spiritual concepts with material and manifest objects in a "uniquely Zoroastrian"[1] way: not only as abstract "aspects" of Ahura Mazda but also worthy of reverence themselves and personified or represented in all material things.

The relationship between Ahura Mazda and the Amesha Spenta is an altogether subtle one. In Yasna 31.11 of the Gathas, Ahura Mazda is said to have created the universe with his "thought". In other passages, such as Yasna 45.4, he is described as the metaphorical "father" of the individual Amesha Spenta, which, even though it is figurative, suggests a familial closeness. In particular, the relationship between Ahura Mazda and Spenta Mainyu is multifaceted and complex and "as hard to define as that of Yahweh and the Holy Spirit in Judaism and Christianity." [15]

A veneration for the Amesha Spenta through the living world is still present in modern Zoroastrian tradition and is evident in every religious ceremony, when each of the Amesha Spenta is visibly represented by objects of which they are the guardians. In addition, the first seven days of the month of the Zoroastrian calendar are dedicated to the great heptad and to creation, acknowledging the preeminence of the Amesha Spenta and so ensuring the inculcation of their doctrine.

Ethical and ontological dualism in the same entity "accounts for the difficulty which some aspects of the doctrine have presented for Western scholars". [1] The reverence of the Amesha Spenta and the Yazatas has been

frequently attacked by non-Zoroastrian sources for its polytheist nature, not only in modern times but also the Sassanid era. While the "worship of the elements" was a repeated accusation during the 4th and 5th centuries, [16] Christian missionaries (such as John Wilson[17]) in 19th-century India specifically targeted the immanence of the Amesha Spenta as indicative of (in their view) a Zoroastrian polytheistic tradition worthy of attack.[18][19]

A frequent target for criticism was the Zoroastrian credo in which the adherent declares, "I profess to be a worshiper of Mazda, follower of the teachings of Zoroaster, ... one who praises and reveres the Amesha Spenta" (the Fravaraneh, Yasna 12.1). Some modern Zoroastrian theologians, especially those identifying with the Reformist school of thought, believe that ethereal spirit and physical manifestation are not separable in any sense and that a reverence of Ahura Mazda's creations is ultimately a worship of the Creator.[16]

In the second half of the 19th century, Martin Haug proposed[20] that Zoroaster himself had viewed the Amesha Spenta as merely philosophical abstractions and that a personification of the heptad was really a later corruption. The Parsis of Bombay gratefully accepted Haug's premise as a defense against the Christian missionaries and subsequently disseminated the idea as a Parsi interpretation, which corroborated Haug's theory. The "continuing monotheism" principle eventually became so popular that it is now almost universally accepted as doctrine.[15][18][19]

Notes

The noun is amesha "immortal" from the negative prefix a + *mer (ProtoIndoEuropean: "death"), and the adjective spenta "furthering, strengthening, bounteous, holy" is its qualifier.

This is also true for all other compounds, including [Ahura] Mazda; only in the Younger Avesta are these unambiguously identifiable as proper nouns.

References

Boyce, Mary (1983). "Aməša Spənta". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Vol. 1. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul. pp. 933–936.

Bundahishn 3.12

Boyce, 1983:933

Yasna 39.3

Yasna 47.1

"Spenta Mainyu | Zoroastrian deity". Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 2019-07-14.

Schlerath, Bernfried (1987). "Aša: Avestan Aša". Encyclopaedia Iranica. Vol. 2. New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul. pp. 694–696..

Yasht 19.96

KREYENBROEK, PHILIP G. (1993). "On Spenta Mainyu's Role in the Zoroastrian Cosmogony". Bulletin of the Asia Institute. 7: 97–103. ISSN 0890-4464. JSTOR 24048432.

Yasna 44.7, 31.3, and 51.7

Yasna 33.6

Yasna 43.6

Yasna 30.5

Yasht 13.2

Boyce, Mary (1983), "Ahura Mazda", Encyclopaedia Iranica, vol. 1, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 684–687.

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusservanji (1938), History of Zoroastrianism, New York: OUP

Wilson, John (1843), The Parsi religion: Unfolded, Refuted and Contrasted with Christianity, Bombay: American Mission Press

Maneck, Susan Stiles (1997), The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change Among the Parsis of India, Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental

Institute pp. 182ff.

Vazquez III, Pablo (2019). "'O Wise One and You Other Ahuras": The Flawed Application of Monotheism Towards Zoroastrianism". Academia.edu.

Haug, Martin; West, Edward W., eds. (1884), *Essays on the Sacred Language, Writings and Religion of the Parsis*, London: Trubner

Further reading

Boyce, Mary (1975), *History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. I, Leiden: Brill, ISBN 90-04-10474-7

Boyce, Mary (1982), *History of Zoroastrianism*, Vol. II, *Under the Achaemenians*, Leiden: Brill, ISBN 90-04-06506-7

Colpe, Carsten (1975), "Reflections on the history of the Amesha-Spenta conception", *Proceedings of the XXIX International Congress of Orientalists*, Paris.

Corbin, Henry (1977). *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*. Princeton University Press.

Kotwal, Firoze (1969), *The Supplementary Texts to the 'Shayest ne-Shayest'*, Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

Categories: Classes of angelsYazatasAncient Iranian deities

This page was last edited on 20 November 2025, at 08:36 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Yazata

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Part of a series on

Zoroastrianism

Primary topics

Divine entities

Scripture and worship

Accounts and legends

History and culture

Adherents

Related topics

icon Religion portal

vte

Yazata (Avestan: 𐬵𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬭𐬀) is the Avestan word for a Zoroastrian concept with a wide range of meanings but generally signifying (or used as an epithet of) a divinity. The term literally means "worthy of worship or veneration", [1][2] and is thus, in this more general sense, also applied to certain healing plants, primordial creatures, the fravashis of the dead, and to certain prayers that are themselves considered holy. The yazatas collectively are "the good powers under Ahura Mazda", who is "the greatest of the yazatas". [3]

Etymology

Yazata is an Avestan-language passive adjectival participle derived from yaz-; "to worship, to honor, to venerate", from Proto-Indo-European *yeh₂ǵ- ("to worship, revere, sacrifice"). The word yasna or yagna– "worship, sacrifice, oblation, prayer" – comes from the same root. A yaza+ ta is accordingly "a being worthy of worship", "an object of worship" or "a holy being".

As the stem form, yazata- has the inflected nominative forms yazatō (𐬵𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬭𐬀), pl. yazatānhō (𐬵𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬭𐬀). These forms reflect Proto-Iranian *yazatah and pl. *yazatāhah. In Middle Persian the term became yazad or yazd (𐭲𐭩𐭥𐭥), pl. yazdān, continuing in New Persian as 'êzad (ایزد).

Related terms in other languages are Sanskrit यजति (yájati, meaning "he worships, he sacrifices"), यजत (yajatá-, "worthy of worship, holy"), यज्ञ (yajñá, "sacrifice"), and perhaps[a] also Greek ἅγιος (hagios, "devoted to the gods, sacred, holy").

In scripture

The term yazata is already used in the Gathas, the oldest texts of Zoroastrianism and believed to have been composed by Zarathustra himself. In these hymns, yazata is used as a generic, applied to Ahura Mazda as well as to the "divine sparks" that are in later tradition the Amesha Spentas. In the Gathas, the yazatas are effectively what the daevas are not; that is, the yazatas are to be worshipped while the daevas are to be rejected.

The Gathas also collectively invoke the yazatas without providing a clue as to which entities are being invoked, and—given the structure and language of the hymns—it is generally not possible to determine whether these yazatas are abstract concepts or are manifest entities. Amongst the lesser Yazatas being invoked by name by the poet of the Gathas are Sraosha, Ashi, Atar, Geush Tashan, Geush Urvan, Tushnamaiti, and Iza, and all of which "win mention in his hymns, it seems, because of their close association with rituals of sacrifice and worship".[5]

In the Younger Avesta, the yazatas are unambiguously divine, with divine powers though performing mundane tasks such as serving as charioteers for other yazatas. Several yazatas are given anthropomorphic attributes, such as cradling a mace or bearing a crown upon their heads, or not letting sleep interrupt their vigil against the demons.

At some point during the late 5th or early 4th century BCE, the Achaemenids instituted a religious calendar in which each day of the month was named after, and placed under the protection of, a particular yazata. These day-name dedications were not only of religious significance because they

ensured that those divinities remained in the public consciousness, they also established a hierarchy among the yazatas, with specific exalted entities having key positions in the day-name dedications (see Zoroastrian calendar for details).

Although these day-name dedications are mirrored in scripture, it cannot be determined whether these day-name assignments were provoked by an antecedent list in scripture (e.g. Yasna 16), or whether the day-name dedications provoked the compilation of such lists. Relatively certain however is that the day-name dedications predate the Avesta's Siroza ("30 days"), which contain explicit references to the yazatas as protectors/guardians of their respective days of the month.

In tradition

The 9th–12th century texts of Zoroastrian tradition observe the yazatas (by then as Middle Persian yazads) in much the same way as the hymns of the Younger Avesta. In addition, in roles that are only alluded to in scripture, they assume characteristics of cosmological or eschatological consequence.

For instance, Aredvi Sura Anahita (Ardvisur Nahid) is both a divinity of the waters as well as a rushing world river that encircles the earth, which is blocked up by Angra Mainyu (Ahriman) thus causing drought. The blockage is removed by Verethragna (Vahram), and Tishtrya (Tir) gathers up the waters and spreads them over the earth (Zam) as rain. In stories with eschatological significance, Sraosha (Sarosh), Mithra (Mihr), and Rashnu (Rashn) are guardians of the Chinvat bridge, the bridge of the separator, across which all souls must pass.

Further, what the calendrical dedications had begun, the tradition completed: at the top of the hierarchy was Ahura Mazda, who was supported by the great heptad of Amesha Spentas (Ameshaspands/Mahraspands), through which the Creator realized ("created with his thought") the manifest universe. The Amesha Spentas in turn had hamkars, "assistants" or

"cooperators", each a caretaker of one facet of creation.

In both tradition and scripture, the terms 'Amesha Spenta' and 'yazata' are sometimes used interchangeably. In general, however, 'Amesha Spenta' signifies the six divine emanations of Ahura Mazda.[6] In tradition, yazata is the first of the 101 epithets of Ahura Mazda. The word also came to be applied to Zoroaster, though Zoroastrians today remain sharply critical of any attempts to deify the prophet. In a hierarchy excluding either Ahura Mazda or the Amesha Spentas amongst the yazatas, the most prominent amongst those "worthy of worship" is Mithra, who "is second only in dignity to Ohrmazd (i.e. Ahura Mazda) himself." [7]

Outside of the traditional yazatas, local and foreign deities may have been incorporated into local religious practice in various distant territories of the Persian Empires. This features prominently in Zoroastrian worship in Armenia, the Kushan Empire, Sogdia, China, and other regions where Zoroastrianism was practiced outside of Iran.[8]

In the present day

In the 1860s and 1870s, the linguist Martin Haug interpreted Zoroastrian scripture in Christian terms, and compared the yazatas to the angels of Christianity. In this scheme, the Amesha Spentas are the arch-angel retinue of Ahura Mazda, with the hamkars as the supporting host of lesser angels.

At the time Haug wrote his translations, the Parsi (i.e. Indian Zoroastrian) community was under intense pressure from English and American missionaries, who severely criticized the Zoroastrians for—as John Wilson portrayed it in 1843—"polytheism", which the missionaries argued was much less worth than their own "monotheism". At the time, Zoroastrianism lacked theologians of its own, and so the Zoroastrians were poorly equipped to make their own case. In this situation, Haug's counter-interpretation came as a welcome relief, and was (by-and-large) gratefully accepted as legitimate. [9]

Haug's interpretations were subsequently disseminated as Zoroastrian ones, which then eventually reached the west where they were seen to corroborate Haug. Like most of Haug's interpretations, this comparison is today so well entrenched that a gloss of 'yazata' as 'angel' is almost universally accepted; both in publications intended for a general audience[10][11] as well as in (non-philological) academic literature.[12][13]

Amongst the Muslims of Iran, Sraosha came to be "arguably the most popular of all the subordinate Yazatas", for as the angel Surush, only he (of the entire Zoroastrian pantheon) is still venerated by name.[14]

Notes

Pokorny, in his comparative dictionary on Indo-European languages, considers Yazata-, yaz-, yasna, Sanskrit yájati and yajñá, and Greek ἅγιος (hagios) all to be derivatives of a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *ǵagʰ-* (*ǵagʰ-*) "religiös verehren"[4] ("religiously venerate"), though some, partially derivative, authorities, such as Calvert Watkins' PIE Roots appendix to The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, give no indication that Greek term is still considered a reflex of this PIE root.

See also

Uthra-Mandaeen light beings that compare to Yazata

References

Boyce 2001, p. xxi.

Geiger 1885, p. xlix.

Büchner 1934, p. 1161.

Pokorny 1930, p. I.195

Boyce 1972, p. 195.

"AMƏŠA SPƏNTA – Encyclopaedia Iranica". www.iranicaonline.org. Retrieved 2019-07-14.

Boyce 1969, p. 24.

The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism. London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. 2015. pp. 83–191. ISBN 978-1-444-33135-6.

"HAUG, MARTIN – Encyclopaedia Iranica". www.iranicaonline.org. Retrieved 2020-04-03.

cf. Gray 1927, p. 562.

cf. Edwards 1927, p. 21.

cf. Luhrmann 2002, p. 871.

cf. Dhalla 1914, p. 135.

Boyce 1993, p. 214.

Bibliography

Boyce, Mary (1969), "On Mithra's Part in Zoroastrianism", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 32 (1): 10–34, doi:10.1017/S0041977X00093678.

Boyce, Mary (1972), *History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. I, Leiden: Brill

Boyce, Mary (1983), "Aməša Spənta", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 1, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Boyce, Mary (1993), "Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies", *Dahma Āfriti and Some Related Problems*, vol. 56, pp. 209–218

Boyce, Mary (2001), *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London: Routledge

Büchner, V. F. (1934), "Yazdān", in Houtsma, Martijn Theodor (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Islam*, vol. IV (1st ed.), Leyden: Brill.

Dhalla, Maneckji Nusserwanji (1914), *Zoroastrian Theology*, New York: OUP

Edwards, E. (1927), "Sacrifice (Iranian)", in Hastings, James (ed.),

Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. XI, Edinburgh: T & T Clark

Geiger, Wilhelm (1885), *Civilization of the Eastern Iranians in Ancient Times*, Oxford: OUP/H. Frowde

Gray, Louis H. (1927), "Jews in Zoroastrianism", in Hastings, James (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VII, Edinburgh: T & T Clark

Luhrmann, T. M. (2002), "Evil in the Sands of Time: Theology and Identity Politics among the Zoroastrian Parsis", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61 (3): 861–889, doi:10.2307/3096349

Maneck, Susan Stiles (1997), *The Death of Ahriman: Culture, Identity and Theological Change Among the Parsis of India*, Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute

Pokorny, J. (1930), *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der Indogermanischen Sprachen (Comparative Dictionary of the Indo-European Languages)*, vol. I, Berlin/Leipzig: Walter De Gruyter.

Watkins, Calvert (2000), "Appendix: PIE Roots", *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (4th ed.), New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Further reading

Peterson, Joseph H. (June 4, 2003), *Angels in Zoroastrianism*, Herndon: avesta.org

External links

Media related to Yazatas at Wikimedia Commons

Category: Yazatas

This page was last edited on 21 March 2025, at 00:04 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Fravashi

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For the 2014 Australian film, see Fravashi (film).

Fravashi (Avestan: 𐬱𐬀𐬭𐬀𐬵𐬀𐬰𐬭𐬀, romanized: frauuaši, /frəˈvɑːʃi/) is the Avestan term for the Zoroastrian concept of a personal spirit of an individual, whether dead, living, or yet-unborn. The fravashi of an individual sends out

the urvan (often translated as 'soul') into the material world to fight the battle of good versus evil. On the morning of the fourth day after death, the urvan returns to its fravashi, where its experiences in the material world are collected to assist the next generation in their fight between good and evil.

In the 9/10th-century works of Zoroastrian tradition, the Pahlavi books, Avestan fravashi continues as Middle Persian fravard (and -w- forms, fraward etc), fravahr, fravash or fravaksh.[1] The last days of a year, called frawardigan (compare New Persian farvardin, first month within the Persian calendar), are dedicated to the fravashis. The first month of the year as well as the 19th day of each month are considered under the protection of, and named after, the fravashis. The winged-disc symbol of Zoroastrianism is traditionally interpreted as a depiction of a fravashi.

Etymology

The word fravashi is commonly perceived to have var- "to choose," as its root. From reconstructed *fravarti (/rt/ clusters in Avestan usually appear as /š/), fravashi could then mean "one who has been selected (for exaltation)." The same root, in the sense of "to choose/profess a faith," is found in the word fravarane, the name of the Zoroastrian credo.

Other interpretations take other meanings of var- into consideration: Either as var- "to cover" that in a bahuvrihi with fra- "to ward" provides "protective valor," or a derivation from var- "to make/be pregnant" which gives "promoter of birth, birth-spirit." One interpretation considers a derivation from vart- "turn" hence "turning away, departing, death." The Epistles of Zadspram, a 10th century exegetical work, derives fravashi from fra-vaxsh "to grow forth." [2]

In scripture

See also: Frawardin Yasht

Like most other Zoroastrian yazatas, the fravashis are not mentioned in the Gathas. The earliest mention of them is in the Old Avestan Yasna Haptanghaiti (Y. 37) which includes an invocation of "the fravashis of the righteous" (ashavan). In chapter 57 of the Yasna, the fravashis are responsible for the course of the sun, moon, and stars (and will do so until the renovation of this world), and in nurturing waters and plants, and protecting the unborn in the womb.

The principal source of information on the fravashis is the Frawardin Yasht, the hymn that is addressed to them and in which they appear as beings who inhabit the stratosphere, and aid and protect those who worship them, and in which the fravashis are presented on the same level as the lesser yazatas. [3] Yasht 13 is one of the eight "great" yashts, and at 158 verses the longest text in the collection, and one of the better preserved ones as well.[4] It is also the second-most frequently recited Yasht (after Yasht 1 to Mazda).[4] Several different authors contributed to the hymn, and its literary quality is uneven; while some verses are rich in traditional poetic phrases, others are of dully imitative prose.[3] The frequently repeated kshnuman (formulaic invocation) of Yasht 13 is "We worship the good, strong, bounteous fravašis of the righteous (ashavan)."

Yasht 13 begins with a cosmogonical chapter in which the Creator Ahura Mazda is portrayed as acknowledging that material creation was brought about with the assistance of "many hundreds, many thousands, many tens of thousands" of "mighty, victorious fravashis" (13.1-2). Moreover, Mazda is presented as acknowledging that without the help of the fravashis, cattle and men would have been lost to Angra Mainyu. "This declaration is wholly unorthodox, and unsupported by any other text." [3] Verses 14-15, as also several other verses scattered through the text, describe how the fravashis continue to sustain the material world and mankind in the post-creation phase of the world. Verses 16-17, as also several other later verses, celebrate their military prowess and assistance in battle, where they are invoked. Verse 20 includes an injunction to memorize their invocation, so as to be able to call on them in times of need.[3]

In 13.49-52, the hymn turns to the function of the fravashis in relation to the dead. There, the fravashis of the dead are said to return to their (former) homes during the last days of the year (Hamaspahmaedaya, frawardigan), hoping to be worshipped and receive gifts, in exchange for which they bless those who live there. This section (karda), known to priests by its opening words as the ya visatha, also appears in Siroza 1/2 and several Afrinagans, notably those of Arda Fravash (the 'righteous fravash') and Dahman (the yazata of prayer), and is thus a frequently recited passage.[3] In Yt. 13.65-68, the fravashi are associated with prosperity, and annually strive to ensure that "family, settlement, tribe, and country" has rain. Verses 149 and 155 are likewise related to the urvan of the dead, and offer worship to both urvan and fravashi as distinct parts of a mortal's immaterial nature.[5] And while they are said to have martial prowess in some passages, elsewhere (13.49-52, 13.96-144), they are co-eval with the relatively helpless urvan.[6] This co-identification also occurs elsewhere in the Avesta, such as in Yasna 16.7, where it is explicit.[7]

According to Mary Boyce, the perplexing anomalies of Yasht 13 are residual traces of fravashi cult, which she defines as a form of an ancestor worship and/or hero-cult that developed during (what she calls) the 'Iranian Heroic Age' (c. 1500 BCE onwards).[8]

In tradition

A graphic depiction similar to one carved in Persepolis.

Although there is no physical description of a fravashi in the Avesta, the faravahar, one of the best known symbols of Zoroastrianism, is commonly believed to be the depiction of one. The attribution of the name (which derives from the Middle Iranian word for fravashi) to the symbol is probably a later development. In Avestan language grammar, the fravashi are unmistakably female, while the faravahar symbol is unmistakably male.

In the Denkard's myth of Zoroaster's conception (Dk., 7.2.15-47), his frawahr

is sent down from heaven within a unique hom-plant to be united on earth with his mortal body (tanu) and appointed glory (xwarrah).[9] In the Bundahishn's creation myth narrates a fable in which the fravashis are given a choice of either remaining protected with Ahura Mazda, or being born into mortals, suffering but also helping bring about the defeat of Angra Mainyu. The fravashis are shown the future before the creation of the getik material world. Ohrmazd's offer of security with inaction is rejected and the fravashi consent to enter the material world as active allies in the battle against evil (GBd. 34.12f).[10] In another cosmological myth (Zadspram 3.2-3), when Angra Mainyu breaks into the created world, the fravashis draw together on the rim of the sky to imprison him.[9] The Denkard, Shikand gumanic vichar, Menog i khrat, Zatspram, and several other works together include an extensive theological exegesis on the distinction between getik and menok (material and immaterial) aspects of creation, and between the fraward and urvan.[11]

In the hierarchy of the yazatas, the fravashis are the assistants of the Amesha Spenta Haurvatat (Middle Persian: Khordad) of "Wholeness", whose special domain are "the Waters" (Avestan Apo, Middle Persian: Aban).

In the day-name dedications of the Zoroastrian calendar, the fravashis preside over the 19th day of the month and the first month of the year, and both are named after the frawards. The intersection of the month-name and day-name dedications are the name-day feast of the frawards. This feast day of farvardin jashan is especially observed by Zoroastrians who have lost a relative in the preceding year. Additionally, the fourth watch (gah) of the twenty-four-hour day, from sunset to midnight, is under the protection of the frawards.

References

Citations

Boyce 2001a, p. 195.

Bailey 1943, p. 109.

Boyce 2001b, p. 200.

Boyce 2001b, p. 199.

Boyce 2001b, p. 201.

Boyce 2001a, p. 196.

Boyce 2001a, p. 197.

Boyce 2001a, pp. 195–198.

Boyce 2001b, p. 197.

Bailey 1943, pp. 108–109.

Bailey 1943, pp. 97–118.

Works cited

Bailey, Harold Walter (1943), Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books, Ratanbai Katrak Lectures, Oxford: Clarendon.

Boyce, Mary (2001a), "Fravaši", Encyclopedia Iranica, vol. 10, Costa Mesa: Mazda, pp. 195–199

Boyce, Mary (2001b), "Frawardīn Yašt", Encyclopedia Iranica, vol. 10, Costa Mesa: Mazda, pp. 199–201.

Malandra, William (1971), The Fravaši Yašt, Ann Arbor: University Microfilms

Narten, Joanna (1985), "Avestisch frauuaši", Indo-Iranian Journal, 28: 35–48, doi:10.1163/000000085790081930

vte

Zoroastrian-Iranian calendar

Days

HormazdBahmanArdibehestShehrevAraspandarmadKhordadAmardadDae-Pa-AdarAdarAvanKhorshedMohorTirGoshDae-Pa-MeherMeherSroshRashneFravardinBehramRamGovadDae-Pa-

DinDinAshishvanghAshtadAsmanZamyadMahraspandAneran

Months

FravardinArdibehestKhordadTirAmardadShehrevarMeherAvanAdarDaeBahmanAspandarmad

Festivals

GambharsNowruzPatetiKhordad SalZartosht No-DisoSadeh

Jashe/Parab days

Fravardigan

(Mukhtad)ArdibeheshtganKhordadganTiraganAmordadeganShahrivarganMehheraganAbaneganAzarganDaeganBahmanaganSepandarmazgan

icon Religion portal Category

Categories: YazatasAncient Iranian legendary creatures

This page was last edited on 3 August 2025, at 18:32 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Metatron

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Not to be confused with Megatron, Magnetron, or Mettaton.

For other uses, see Metatron (disambiguation).

Islamic portrayal of the angel Metatron (Arabic: ميٲططرون) depicted in the Daqa'iq al-Haqa'iq (دقائق الحقائق 'Degrees of Truths') by Nasir ad-Din Rammal in the 14th century CE.

Metatron (Mishnaic Hebrew: מֶטַטְרֹן *Meṭāṭrōn*),^{[1][a][b][5][6]} or Matatron (מַטַּטְרֹן, *Maṭṭaṭrōn*),^{[7][8]} is an angel in Judaism, Gnosticism, and Islam. Metatron is mentioned three times in the Talmud,^{[9][1][10]} in a few brief passages in the Aggadah, the Targum,^[11] and in mystical Kabbalistic texts within Rabbinic literature. The figure forms one of the traces for the presence of dualist proclivities in Gnosticism and the otherwise monotheistic vision of the Tanakh.^[12] In Rabbinic literature, he is

sometimes portrayed as serving as the celestial scribe.[9][11] The name Metatron is not mentioned in the Torah or the Bible, and how the name originated is a matter of debate. In Islamic tradition, he is also known as Miṭaṭrūn (Arabic: ميظرون), the angel of the veil.[13][14]:192

In Jewish apocrypha, early Kabbalah, and rabbinic literature,[11] Metatron is the name that Enoch received after his transformation into an angel.

Etymology

Numerous etymologies have been proposed to account for the name Metatron, but there is no consensus, and its precise origin is unknown.[15] [16]:92–97 Some scholars, such as Philip Alexander, believe that if the name Metatron originated in Hekhalot literature and Merkabah texts such as 3 Enoch, then it may have been a magical word like Adiriron and Dapdapiron. [17]

Hugo Odeberg,[18] Adolf Jellinek,[19] and Marcus Jastrow[20] suggest the name may have originated from either *mattara* (מטרא, lit. 'keeper of the watch') or the verb *memater* (ממטר, 'to guard' or 'to protect'). An early derivation of this can be seen in *Shimmusha Rabbah*, where Enoch is clothed in light and is the guardian of the souls ascending to heaven. Odeberg also suggested that the name Metatron might have been adopted from the Old Persian name Mithra.[18] Citing Wiesner,[21] he drew up several parallels that appeared to link Mithra and Metatron based on their positions in heaven and duties.

Another hypothesis would derive Metatron from a combination of two Greek words, μετά (*meta*, meaning 'after') and θρόνος (*thronos*, meaning 'throne'), which, taken together, would suggest the idea of 'one who serves behind the throne' or 'one who occupies the throne next to the throne of glory'. [22] The primary arguments against this etymology are that Metatron's function as a servant of the celestial throne emerges only later in the traditions regarding

him, and *θρόνος* itself is not attested as a word in Talmudic literature.[23]

A connection with the word *σύνθρονος* (*synthronos*) used as 'co-occupant of the divine throne', has been advanced by some scholars;[c] This, like the above etymology, is not found in any source materials.[18] It is supported by Saul Lieberman and Peter Schäfer, who give further reasons why this might be a viable etymology.[25] The Latin word *metator* ('messenger, guide, leader, measurer') had been suggested by Eleazar of Worms (c. 1165 – c. 1230), Nachmanides, and brought to light again by Hugo Odeberg.[18] When transliterated into the Hebrew language, it is given as מטיטור (*mṯṭwr*) or מיטטור (*myṭṭwr*). Gershom Scholem argues that there is no data to justify the conversion of *metator* to Metatron.[26] Philip Alexander also suggests this as a possible origin of Metatron, stating that the word *metator* also occurs in Greek as *mitator* – a word for an officer in the Roman army who acted as a forerunner. Using this etymology, Alexander suggests the name may have come about as a description of 'the angel of the Lord who led the Israelites through the wilderness: acting like a Roman army *metator* guiding the Israelites on their way'.[27][28]

Other ideas include *μέτρον* (*metron*, 'a measure').[29] Charles Mopsik believes that the name Metatron may be related to the sentence from Genesis 5:24, "Enoch walked with God, then he was no more, because God took him".[30] The LXX version of the Hebrew word לקח ("took") is μετέθηκεν.

In the entry entitled "Paradigmata" in his study "'The Written' as the Vocation of Conceiving Jewishly", John W. McGinley gives an accounting of how this name functions in the Bavli's version of "four entered pardes".[31]

Origins

In the Hellenistic period, mention of a second divine figure, either beside Yahweh or beneath him, occurs in several Jewish texts, mostly apocryphal.

[citation needed] These Jewish traditions implying a divine dualism were most frequently associated with Enoch. In the rabbinic period, they center on 'Metatron', often in the context of debates over the heretical doctrine of 'two powers in heaven' (shtei rashuyot ba-shamayim).[32][12] Ultimately, these ideas appear to go back to differing interpretations of the heavenly enthronement passages at Exodus 24:10, Daniel 7:9. and perhaps even Ezekiel 1:26.[33] These different interpretations later came to distinguish what was orthodox from what was heretical in Judaism.

Among the pseudepigrapha 1 Enoch: Book of Parables presents two figures: the son of man and Enoch. At first, these two characters seem to be separate entities. Enoch views the son of man enthroned in Heaven. Later, however, they prove to be the same. Many scholars believe that the final chapters in the Book of Parables are a later addition. Others think they are not and that the son of man is Enoch's heavenly double, similar to the Prayer of Joseph, where Jacob is depicted as an angel.[16] The Book of Daniel displays two similar characters: the Ancient of Days and the one like a man. Parts of the text in Daniel are Aramaic and may have been changed in translation. The Septuagint reads that the son of man came as the Ancient of Days. All other translations say the son of man gained access to the Ancient of Days and was brought before that one.[34]

The identification of Enoch with Metatron in 3 Enoch, where the name first appears, is not explicitly made in the Talmud, although it does refer to a Prince of the World who was young but now is old. However, some of the earliest kabbalists assumed the connection. There also seem to be two Metatrons, one spelled with six letters (מטטרון), and one spelled with seven (מיטטרון). The former may be the transformed Enoch, Prince of the Countenance within the divine palace; the latter, the Primordial Metatron, a sephira "persona" of the "Cause of Causes", specifically the tenth and last persona, identified with the earthly Shekhina.[35] Furthermore, the Merkabah text Re'uyot Yehezkel identifies the Ancient of Days from the Book of Daniel as Metatron.[34]

Scholem's scholastic analysis

Many scholars see a discontinuity between how Enoch is portrayed in the early Enoch literature and how Metatron is portrayed. Scholars commonly see the character of Metatron as being based on an amalgam of Jewish literature; in addition to Enoch, Michael, Melchizedek, and Yahoel among others are seen as influences.[16]

Scholem argues two streams of thought influenced Metatron's character: One linking Metatron with Enoch, and one fusing different obscure entities and mythic motifs.[36] Scholem argues that this second tradition was originally separate but later fused with the Enoch tradition.[16] He points to texts where this second Metatron is a primordial angel and referred to as Metatron Rabbah.[16] Scholem theorizes that the two Hebrew spellings of Metatron's name represent these two separate traditions.[16] In his view, the second Metatron is linked to Yahoel. Scholem also links Yahoel with Michael.[16] In the Apocalypse of Abraham, Yahoel is assigned duties normally reserved for Michael. Yahoel's name is commonly seen as a substitute for the Ineffable Name.[37]

In 2 Enoch, Enoch is assigned titles commonly used by Metatron such as "the Youth, the Prince of the Presence and the Prince of the World." [16] Enoch is not called the Lesser Yahweh.[16] In 3 Enoch, Metatron is called the Lesser Yahweh. This raises a problem since the name Metatron does not seem to be directly related to the name of God, Yahweh.[16] Scholem proposes that this is because the Lesser Yahweh is a reference to Yahoel.[16] In Maaseh Merkabah, the text reasons that Metatron is called the Lesser YHWH because in Hebrew gematria, Metatron is numerically equivalent to another name of God Shaddai.[38] Scholem does not find this convincing.[16][39] Scholem points to the fact that both Yahoel and Metatron were known as the Lesser YHWH. In 3 Enoch 48D1, Metatron is called both Yahoel Yah and Yahoel.[40] In addition to being one of the seventy names of Metatron from 3 Enoch 48D, Yahoel and Metatron are also linked in Aramaic incantation bowl inscriptions.[16][41]

Talmud

The Babylonian Talmud mentions Metatron by name in three places: Hagigah 15a, Sanhedrin 38b, and Avodah Zarah 3b.

Hagigah 15a describes Elisha ben Abuyah in Paradise seeing Metatron sitting down (an action that is not done in the presence of God). Elishah ben Abuyah therefore looks to Metatron as a deity and says heretically: "Perhaps there are, God forbid, two powers in Heaven!"[9] The rabbis explain that Metatron had permission to sit because of his function as the Heavenly Scribe, writing down the deeds of Israel.[42] The Talmud states that it was proved to Elisha that Metatron could not be a second deity by the fact that Metatron received 60 "strokes with fiery rods" to demonstrate that Metatron was not a god, but an angel, and could be punished.[43]

In Sanhedrin 38b, one of the minim tells Rabbi Idith that Metatron should be worshiped because he has a name like his master. Rabbi Idith uses the same passage Exodus 23:21 to show that Metatron was an angel and not a deity and thus should not be worshiped. Furthermore, as an angel, Metatron has no power to pardon transgressions nor was he to be received even as a messenger of forgiveness.[43][44]

In Avodah Zarah 3b, the Talmud hypothesizes as to how God spends His day. It is suggested that in the fourth quarter of the day God sits and instructs the school children, but that before the destruction of the Temple, Metatron may have taken God's place in this activity.

Yevamot 16b records an utterance, "I have been young; also I have been old" found in Psalm 37:25. The Talmud here attributes this utterance to the "chief angel" and "prince of the world", whom the rabbinic tradition identifies as Metatron.[45]

Kirkisani

The tenth-century Karaite scholar Jacob Qirqisani believed that rabbinic Judaism was the heresy of Jeroboam of the Kingdom of Israel.[46] He quoted a version of Sanhedrin 38b,[47] which he claimed contained a reference to the "lesser YHWH". Scholem suggests that the name was deliberately omitted from later copies of the Talmud.[48] Extra-talmudic mystical texts such as Sefer Hekhalot do speak of a "lesser YHWH", apparently deriving the concept from Exodus 23:21, which mentions an angel of whom God says "my name [understood as YHWH, the usual divine Proper Name] is in him".

Merkabah, Zohar and other mystical writings

Metatron also appears in the Pseudepigrapha including Shi'ur Qomah, and most prominently in the Merkabah literature of the 3 Enoch, also called the "Book of Enoch" or "Book of [the Heavenly] Palaces." The book describes the link between Enoch, son of Jared (great-grandfather of Noah) and his transformation into the angel Metatron.

Metatron says, "He [the Holy One] called me, 'The lesser YHWH' in the presence of his whole household in the height, as it is written, 'my name is in him'" (12:5, Alexander's translation). The narrator of this book, supposedly Rabbi Ishmael, tells how Metatron guided him through Heaven and explained its wonders. 3 Enoch presents Metatron in two ways: as a primordial angel (9:2–13:2) and as the transformation of Enoch after he was assumed into Heaven.[49][50]

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.

—Genesis 5:24, King James Version[51]

This Enoch, whose flesh was turned to flame, his veins to fire, his eye-lashes to flashes of lightning, his eye-balls to flaming torches, and whom God placed on a throne next to the throne of glory, received after this heavenly transformation the name Metatron.[52]

Metatron "the Youth", a title previously used in 3 Enoch, where it appears to mean "servant".[50] It identifies him as the angel that led the people of Israel through the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt (again referring to Exodus 23:21), and describes him as a heavenly priest.

In the later Ecstatic Kabbalah, Metatron is a messianic figure.[53]

The Zohar describes Metatron as the "King of the angels".[54] and associates the concept of Metatron with that of the divine name Shaddai.[55] Zohar commentaries such as the Ohr Yakar by Moses ben Jacob Cordovero explain the Zohar as meaning that Metatron as the head of Yetzira[56] This corresponds closely with Maimonides' description of the Talmudic "Prince of the World",[57] traditionally associated with Metatron,[58] as the core "Active Intellect".[59][60]

The Zohar describes several biblical figures as metaphors for Metatron. Examples are Enoch,[61][62] Joseph,[63][64] Eliezer,[65] Joshua,[66] and others. The Zohar uses "youth" to describe Joseph and Joshua, a hint that the figures are a metaphor to Metatron, and also the concept of servant by Eliezer as a reference to Metatron.[67] The Staff of Moses is also described by the Zohar[62] as a reference to Metatron. The Zohar also states that the two tets in the word totafot (Biblical Hebrew: טוֹטַפֹּת, lit. "'tefillin'") are a reference to Metatron.[68] The Zohar distinguishes Metatron and Michael. [69] While Michael is described repeatedly in the Zohar as the figure represented by the High Priest, Metatron is represented by the structure of the tabernacle itself.[69]

Apocalyptic texts

In the Apocalypse of Zerubbabel, Metatron is not identified as Enoch. Instead, he is recognized as the archangel Michael.[16][36] The text also records that Metatron in gematria is the equivalent of Shaddai.[36] While he

also appears in other apocalyptic writings, he is most prominent in the Apocalypse of Zerubbabel.[36] In these writings, he plays the role of heavenly interlocutor delivering knowledge about the coming messianic age.
[36]

Islam

Part of a series on

Islam

Beliefs

Practices

TextsFoundations

History

Culture and society

Related topics

Islam portal

vte

The earliest account of Metatron within Islamic scriptures might derive directly from the Quran itself. Uzair, according to Surah 9:30–31 venerated as a Son of God by Jews, commonly interpreted as an Arabic transliteration of the Hebrew name of the prophet Ezra, who was also identified with Enoch and Metatron in Merkabah Mysticism.[14]:184 In Islamic tradition, Metatron became a symbol for the idea that Jews worship "God-as-old-man" or an angelic being instead of God.[14]:184 Muslim heresiologists repeatedly accused Jews for venerating an angel as a lesser god (or an Incarnation of God), especially for celebrating Rosh Hashanah.[70]

The name itself is attested early in Islam by al-Kindi and al-Masudi.[14]:192 Al-Suyuti identifies him as the angel of the veil and only he knows about that which lies beyond.[71][13][14]:193 He is also frequently mentioned in the magical works by Ahmad al-Buni, who describes Metatron as wearing a crown and a lance, probably constituting the Staff of Moses.[14]:198 In other magical practises, he is invoked to ward off evil jinn, devils, sorcerers and other magical threats.[14]:199

Ibn Hazm mentions that Jews, although regarding Metatron as an angel, would celebrate Metatron as a lesser god ten days each year, perhaps a reference to Rosh Hashanah in connection with Merkabah mysticism that Metatron took part on the creation of the world.[70]

In popular culture

Alan Rickman played Metatron in 1999

Metatron is invoked in a love ritual by the witch Geli Tripping in Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).[72]

Metatron appears as an angel and the spokesperson of God in the novel *Good Omens* (1990) and its 2019 TV adaptation. Metatron is played in the series by Derek Jacobi.[73][74]

Metatron appears in Phillip Pullman's novel series, *His Dark Materials* (1995–2000), as the main antagonist.[75] He was originally a human named Enoch before becoming a high-ranking angel and Regent of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the 2019 BBC/HBO TV adaptation, he is portrayed by Alex Hassell.[76]

Metatron appears in the 1999 movie *Dogma* as an angel and the voice of God, played by Alan Rickman.[77]

Guitarist Carlos Santana said in 2000 that he has been in contact with Metatron since 1994, and that the angel gives him messages.[78]

Metatron appears in the TV series Supernatural (2005) as the scribe of God, played by Curtis Armstrong.[79]

Both the lyrics and title of the second track on The Mars Volta's 2008 album, The Bedlam in Goliath, refer to Metatron.[80][81]

See also

Adam Kadmon

Abatur in Mandaism

Archangel

Sandalphon

Theophany

Yufin-Yufafin in Mandaism

List of angels in theology

Notes

Also written as מֵטַטְרֹן, Məṭaṭrōn,[2] מִיטְטְרֹן, Mēṭaṭrōn, מִיטְטְרֹן, Mīṭaṭrōn,[3] מֵטַטְרֹן, Meṭaṭrōn,[4] מִיטְטְרֹן, Mīṭṭaṭrōn

There are two spelling variations of the name Metatron that can be found in the Talmud. Firstly there is the more full spelling of מִיטְטְרֹן, as can be seen in Chagigah 15a:6. The consonant yod (י) acts as a mater lectionis (mother of reading), usually indicating the vowel hiriq (ī). Secondly there is the slightly shorter and more common spelling of מֵטַטְרֹן without the yod, as can be seen in Sanhedrin 38b:19 for example. With the absence of the yod representing the vowel hiriq, this vowel would be pronounced shorter. This short hiriq (i) would also cause the teth (ט) following the mem (מ) to geminate, giving the pronunciation of Mīṭṭaṭrōn (מִיטְטְרֹן). The full spelling with yod representing hiriq may also indicate that the name has its origins in the word Mīṭāṭōr (מִיטְטֹר), referring to a measurer of boundaries; an officer sent in advance of persons of high rank, or of troops, to lay out the camp or to arrange quarters; a quartermaster.

synthronos, the Greek term metatyrannos, which can be translated as "the

one next to the ruler".[24]

References

"Sanhedrin 38b:19". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 10 June 2023.

"Bereshit Rabbah 5:4". Sefaria.

"Incantation bowl, late-post Sasanian, 6th C.-8th C." The British Museum.

"Chagigah 15a:6". Sefaria.

Jastrow, Marcus (1903). "Jastrow, מִיטְטוֹר". Sefaria.

Jastrow, Marcus (2004) [1903]. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*. Judaica Treasury. p. 767. ISBN 978-1-932-44320-2.

Jastrow, Marcus (1903). "Jastrow, מִטְטָרוֹן". Sefaria.

Schechter, Solomon; Levias, Caspar. "GEMATRIA: Metatron". *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

"Chagigah 15a:5". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 10 June 2023.

"Avodah Zarah 3b:12". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 10 June 2023.

"Targum Jonathan on Genesis 5:24". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 2024-05-22.

Stroumsa, Guy G. (2015). *The Making of the Abrahamic Religions in Late Antiquity*. Oxford University Press. p. 15. ISBN 978-0-198-73886-2.

Burge, Stephen R. (2015). *Angels in Islam - Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti's Al-Haba'ik Fi Akhbar Al-mala'ik*. Taylor & Francis. p. 48. ISBN 978-1-136-50474-7.

Wasserstrom, Steven M. (2014). *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam*. Princeton University Press. ISBN 978-1-400-86413-3.

Orlov, Andrei A. "The Name "Metatron"" (PDF). *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*. pp. 92–96. Archived (PDF) from the original on 30 October 2021.

Orlov, Andrei A. (2005). "Evolution of the Roles and Titles in Early Enochic

Booklets". The Enoch-Metatron Tradition. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism. Vol. 107. Mohr Siebeck. pp. 83–86, 140–142. doi:10.1628/978-3-16-158687-3. ISBN 978-3-161-48544-2. S2CID 198676033.

Alexander, Philip S. (1977). The Historical Settings of the Hebrew Book of Enoch. Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies. p. 162.

Odeberg, Hugo, ed. (2012) [1928]. "Origin of the Word 'Metatron'". 3 Enoch or The Hebrew Book of Enoch. CreateSpace. pp. 125–142. ISBN 978-1-479-37227-0.

Jellinek, Adolf (1852). Contributions to the History of Kabbalah - Parts I & II. Leipzig: C.L. Fritzsche. p. 4. Free access icon

Jastrow, Marcus (1903) [1887]. A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature. Vol. II. London: Luzac. p. 767. ISBN 978-1-565-63860-0.

in Ben Chananja, 1862, p. 384; 1866, pp. 600–625

Schäfer, Peter (2012) [1992]. The Hidden and Manifest God - Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism. SUNY Series in Judaica. State University of New York Press. p. 29. ISBN 978-1-438-41882-7. most probable is the etymology of Lieberman: Metatron = Greek metatronos = metathronos = synthronos; i.e. the small "minor god" whose throne is beside that of the great "God"

Gershom Scholem, 'Metatron,' in Encyclopedia Judaica, 2nd edition 2007, vol. 14 pp. 132–134. Also his Major Trends, p. 69, and his Jewish Gnosticism, pp.43, 91. Scholem dismissed this hypothesis as 'without merit'.

Philip Alexander, "3 Enoch"

Gruenwald, Ithamar (2018) [1980]. "Metatron, the Meaning of His Name and His Functions". Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism. Leiden/Cologne: E. J. Brill. pp. 235–241. ISBN 978-9-004-33267-6.

Gershom Scholem, Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition, Jewish Theological Seminary of America 2nd. ed. 1965 pp41,93.

Alexander, P. "From Son of Adam to a Second God" and Alexander, P. "3 Enoch"

Urbach, Ephraïm Elimelech (1987) [1979]. The Sages - Their Concepts and Beliefs. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. ISBN 978-0-674-78523-6. OCLC 15489564.

Black, Matthew (1951). "The Origin of the Name of Metatron". *Vetus Testamentum*. 1 (3). E.J. Brill: 217–219. doi:10.2307/1515863. JSTOR 1515863. Can be linked back to the title praemetitor in Philos QG which can be connected to the Greek word for Metator "measurer"

Mopsik, Charles (1989). *Le Livre hébreu d'Hénoch ou Livre des palais*. Paris: Verdier. ISBN 978-2-864-32088-3.

McGinley, John W. (2006). 'The Written' as the Vocation of Conceiving Jewishly. *iUniverse*. p. 432. ISBN 978-0-595-40488-9. The entry 'Paradigmata' gives an accounting of the meaning of 'Metatron' as it is used in the Bavli's version of 'four entered pardes'.

Segal, Alan F. (2002). "Chapter Three. Aher, Metatron, Merkabah and the Angel of YHWH". *Two Powers in Heaven - Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism*. E.J. Brill. p. 60. ISBN 978-0-391-04172-1.

Segal *ibid.* p.60

Deutsch, Nathaniel (1999). *Guardians of the Gate - Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity*. E.J. Brill. pp. 45–47. ISBN 978-9-004-10909-4.

von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa (1993). Tyson, Donald; Freake, James (eds.). *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Llewellyn Worldwide. p. 473. ISBN 978-0-875-42832-1.

Reeves, John C. (2005). *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalyptic: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader*. Society of Biblical Literature Atlanta. pp. 55, 180–185. ISBN 978-1-589-83102-5.

Ginzberg, Louis (1906). "Abraham, Apocalypse of". *Jewish Encyclopedia*.

Wolfson, Elliot R. (1994). *Through a Speculum That Shines - Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*. Princeton University Press. p. 259. ISBN 978-0-691-01722-8.

Charlesworth, James H. (1983). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Hendrickson Publishers. p. 227. ISBN 978-1-598-56491-4.

Deutsch, Nathaniel (1999). Guardians of the Gate - Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity. E.J. Brill. pp. 36–37. ISBN 978-9-004-10909-4.

Charlesworth, James H. (2006). The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran Community. Baylor University Press. p. 369. ISBN 978-1-932-79220-1.

Scholem, Gershom (1974). Kabbalah. Quadrangle. pp. 378–380. ISBN 978-0-812-90352-2.

Society for Jewish Study (1983). "The Journal of Jewish Studies Volumes 34–35". Journal of Jewish Studies. Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies: 26. Retrieved 5 March 2014.

Herford, Robert Travers (1903). Christianity in Talmud and Midrash. Williams & Norgate. pp. 286–290. Metatron christianity.

Matt, Daniel Chanan, ed. (2005). The Zohar, Volume 3; Volume 2006. Stanford University Press. p. 86. ISBN 978-0-804-75210-7.

Solomon, Norman (2009). The A to Z of Judaism. Scarecrow Press. p. 217. ISBN 978-0-810-87011-6.

Scholem, Gershom (2011). Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. p. 366. ISBN 978-0-307-79148-1.

Cohon, Samuel S. (1987). Essays in Jewish Theology. Hebrew Union College Press. ISBN 978-0-878-20117-4.

Weimer, Christopher M., ed. (2002) [1893]. "Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise". Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. Archived from the original on 2 January 2007.

Alexander, P. (1983). "3 (Hebrew Apocalypse of) Enoch". In Charlesworth, James H. (ed.). The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. New York: Doubleday. p. 223. ISBN 978-0-385-19491-4.

Genesis 5:24

Scholem, Gershom G. (2011) [1941]. Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. Knopf Doubleday. p. 67. ISBN 978-0-307-79148-1.

Koslowski, P., ed. (2002). Progress, Apocalypse, and Completion of History

and Life after Death of the Human Person in the World Religions. Springer. p. 58. ISBN 978-1-402-00647-0.

Zohar 3. p. 293a.

Zohar Chadash. Sifra Tanina 11.

Matok Midvash on Zohar 2. p. 149a.

"Yevamot 16b:6". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 2024-05-22.

Tosaphoth on Babylonian Talmud. p. 16b.

"Guide for the Perplexed, Part 2 6:4". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 2024-05-22.

"Guide for the Perplexed, Part 2 4:3". www.sefaria.org. Retrieved 2024-05-22.

Zohar 3. p. 189a.

Zohar 1. p. 27a.

Zohar 1. p. 47a.

Zohar 2. p. 43a.

Zohar 1. p. 130b.

Zohar 2. p. 65b.

Zohar 2. p. 94a.

Zohar 3. p. 226b.

Zohar 2. p. 159a.

Lazarus-Yafeh, Hava (2004). Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism. Princeton University Press. p. 32. ISBN 978-1-400-86273-3. JSTOR [j.ctt7ztthw](https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7ztthw).

Knight, Michael Muhammad (2016). Magic in Islam. New York: TarcherPerigee. p. 120. ISBN 978-1-101-98349-2.

Lynd, Margaret (October 2004). "Science, Narrative, and Agency in Gravity's Rainbow". Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction. 46 (1): 63–80.

doi:10.3200/CRIT.46.1.63-80. ISSN 0011-1619.

Clemons, Amy Lea (2017). "Adapting Revelation: Good Omens as Comic Corrective". *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. 28 (1 (98)): 86–101. ISSN 0897-0521. JSTOR 26390195.

Bryan, Anna (26 January 2022). "Good Omens: All-star cast confirmed for second season of Amazon show filming in Edinburgh and Bathgate". *Edinburgh Evening News*. Retrieved 11 June 2023.

Geddo, Benedetta (January 27, 2023). "A Look Into the Figure of The Authority in 'His Dark Materials'". *The Mary Sue*. Retrieved June 13, 2023.

Dean, Tyler (January 3, 2023). "'Love Takes a Million Forms': His Dark Materials' Series Finale". *tor.com*.

Fry, Carrol Lee (2008). *Cinema of the Occult: New Age, Satanism, Wicca, and Spiritualism in Film*. Associated University Presse. pp. 39–40. ISBN 978-0-934223-95-9.

Heath, Chris (16 March 2000). "The Epic Life of Carlos Santana". *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved 16 June 2023.

Giannini, Erin (7 November 2017). *Joss Whedon Versus the Corporation: Big Business Critiqued in the Films and Television Programs*. McFarland. p. 184. ISBN 978-1-476-66776-8.

"Mars Volta encounters demons and spirits during recording of *Bedlam in Goliath*". *The Marquee Magazine*.

"The Mars Volta". *The Week*. 8 January 2015. Retrieved 14 June 2023.

Further reading

"Form(s) of God - Some Notes on Metatron and Christ" by G. G. Stroumsa, *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 76 (1983), 269–288

"The Boundaries of Divine Ontology - The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead" by Daniel Abrams, *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 87 (1994)

Orlov, Andrei A. (2005). *The Enoch-Metatron tradition. Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. ISBN 978-3-16-148544-2.

External links

Wikiquote has quotations related to Metatron.

Wikimedia Commons has media related to Metatron.

vte

Angels in Abrahamic religions

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: Enoch (ancestor of Noah)Individual angelsPeople celebrated in the Lutheran liturgical calendarScribesArchangelsAngels of the PresenceArchangels in JudaismArchangels in IslamSupernatural beings identified with Christian saints

This page was last edited on 19 October 2025, at 16:42 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Raziel

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article is about the angel in Jewish mysticism. For other uses, see Raziel (disambiguation).

Archangel Raziel (Circle of Francisco de Zurbarán), circa 1650.

Raziel (Hebrew: רַזִּיֵּאֵל Rāzī'ēl, "God is my Mystery"), also known as Gallitsur (Hebrew: גַּלִּיטִסוּר Gallīṣūr),^[1] is an angel within the teachings of Jewish mysticism (of the Kabbalah of Judaism) who is the "Angel of Secrets" and the "Angel of Mysteries". He is also called "Keeper of All Magic." He is one of the angels associated with the sephirah Chokmah of Kabbalah, alongside Jophiel.^[2]

The angel Raziel can be compared to the Manda d-Hayyi of Mandaeism. Both are described as intermediaries who convey divine knowledge to humans,

especially Adam. In Jewish mysticism, Raziel delivers the "Sefer Raziel" to Adam, containing esoteric secrets about the universe and divine mysteries, while in Mandaism, Manda d-Hayyi instructs Adam about the mysteries of life and creation.

In Mandaeism, after the creation of the material world, Adam Kasia (Adam Kadmon in the Jewish tradition) asks Abatur (Ancient of Days or Metatron in the Jewish tradition. The Merkabah text Re'uyot Yehezkel identifies the Ancient of Days as Metatron[3]) what he will do when he goes to Tibil (Earth or Malkuth). Abatur responds that Adam will be helped by Manda d-Hayyi, who instructs humans with sacred knowledge and protects them.

Mysticism and tradition

Various teachings assign Raziel to diverse roles, including that of a cherub, [4] a member of the Ophanim,[5] and chief of the Erelim.

Raziel, under the alternate name Gallitsur, "Revealer of The Rock", is described as the "ruling prince of the 2nd Heaven". He is said to expound the clear teachings of the "Torah's divine wisdom" and protects the ministering angels from the living creatures that uphold the universe.[6][7]

Authorship of Sefer Raziel HaMalakh

The famous Sefer Raziel HaMalakh ("Book of Raziel the Angel") attributed to this figure is said to contain all secret knowledge, and it is considered to be a book of magic. He stands close by God's throne and therefore hears and writes down everything said and discussed.[4] He purportedly gave the book to Adam and Eve after they ate from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil (that resulted in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden) so the two could find their way back "home" and better understand their God. Raziel's fellow angels were deeply disturbed by this, and thus stole the book from Adam and threw it into the ocean. God did not punish Raziel, but instead retrieved the book through the Rahab and returned it to Adam and

Eve.[2]

According to some sources, the book was passed on through the generations to Enoch (In 3 Enoch believed to have later become the angel Metatron), who may have incorporated his writings into the tome. From Enoch, the archangel Raphael gave it to Noah, who used the wisdom within to build Noah's Ark.[8] The Book of Raziel was said to have come into the possession of King Solomon,[9] and some texts claiming to be this volume have appeared.

Sefer HaRazim, a 4th-century Jewish mystical text which is distinct from Sefer Raziel HaMalakh, is also said to have been given to Noah by the angel Raziel.[10]

In popular culture

In the Japanese light novel series Date A Live, Raziel is the name of a spiritual weapon (referred to as Angels within the series), belonging to Nia Honjou and Kurumi Tokisaki. Raziel is a book containing all knowledge of past and present, as well as capable of manifesting anything written in it as reality.

In Cassandra Clare's The Shadowhunter Chronicles, the angel Raziel is responsible for the creation of the race of Shadowhunters by mixing his blood with mortal men. He also appears as a character within the narrative of the original hexalogy.

In the video game series Legacy of Kain, Raziel is the name of a vampire and the most trusted lieutenant of Kain. After his supposed hubris of surpassing his master, Raziel is thrown into the abyss to be forever consumed and is reborn as a Reaver of Souls, a wraith that consumes souls.

In the Mobile Suit Gundam 00 side story Mobile Suit Gundam 00P, one of the mobile suits featured in the side story is named the Gundam Rasiel. It can then be equipped with the GN Sefer to create the Sefer Rasiel which is named after the Sefer Raziel HaMalakh.

In Robert Stone's novel Damascus Gate, Raziel Melker is a hipster-musician, heroin addict, and devotee of Jewish mysticism who attaches himself to a charismatic but mentally unstable Messiah-figure in 1990s Jerusalem.

See also

Angel

List of angels in theology

Jewish mysticism

Kabbalah

Sephiroth

Manda d-Hayyi

Sefer Raziel

References

Jastrow, Marcus (1903). "Jastrow, רַזִּיֶּל". Sefaria.

Lewis, James R., Oliver, Evelyn Dorothy, Sisung Kelle S. (Editor) (1996), Angels A to Z, Entry: Raziel, pp. 346, 347, Visible Ink Press, ISBN 0-7876-0652-9

Deutsch, Nathaniel (1999). Guardians of the gate: angelic vice regency in late antiquity. Brill's series in Jewish studies. Leiden: Brill. ISBN 978-90-04-10909-4.

"Archangel Raziel". Sarah's Archangels. Archived from the original on 5 July 2007.

Scarborough, Samuel (2002), "The Tree of Life", Filing Cabinet of the Western Mystery Tradition and Methods to Recall the Information, Journal of the Western Mystery Tradition No. 3, Vol 1. Autumnal Equinox 2002

Davidson, Gustav (1967), A Dictionary of Angels, Including The Fallen Angels, Entry: Free Press, p. 120, Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 66-19757, ISBN 9780029070505

Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise (1893), Journal of The Royal Asiatic

Society, London, The Royal Asiatic Society, at sacred-texts.com

Ginzberg, Louis (1909), The Legends of the Jews, Volume 1, Chapter IV, at sacred-texts.com

Raziel, Book of at jewishencyclopedia.com

Morgan, Michael A. Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of the Mysteries. Pseudepigrapha Series. Vol. 11. Chico, California: Scholars Press. ISBN 0-89130-615-3.

External links

The Full Hebrew only Sefer Raziel Amsterdam Edition in pdf free download (PDF)

vte

Angels in Abrahamic religions

Categories: Individual angelsAngels in Judaism

This page was last edited on 10 October 2025, at 11:22 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Sefirot

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"Sephiroth" redirects here. For the Final Fantasy character, see Sephiroth (Final Fantasy).

icon

This article needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed.

Find sources: "Sefirot" – news · newspapers · books · scholar · JSTOR (July 2022) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

The Sefirot in Kabbalah

The Sephiroth in Jewish Kabbalah

View the image description page for this diagram The Tree of Life vte

Sefirot (Hebrew: סְפִירוֹת, romanized: səḫīrōt, plural of סְפִירָה)[1] meaning emanations, are the 10 attributes/emanations in Kabbalah,[2] through which Ein Sof ("infinite space") reveals itself and continuously creates both the physical realm and the seder hishtalshelut (the chained descent of the metaphysical Four Worlds). The term is alternatively transliterated into English as sephirot/sephiroth, singular sefira/sephirah.

As revelations of the creator's will (רצון, rāṣon),[3] the sefirot should not be understood as ten gods, but rather as ten different channels through which the one God reveals His will. In later Jewish literature, the ten sefirot refer either to the ten manifestations of God; the ten powers or faculties of the soul; or the ten structural forces of nature.[4]

Alternative configurations of the sefirot are interpreted by various schools in the historical evolution of Kabbalah, with each articulating differing spiritual aspects. The tradition of enumerating 10 is stated in the Sefer Yetzirah, "Ten sefirot of nothingness, ten and not nine, ten and not eleven". [5] As altogether 11 sefirot are listed across the various schemes, two (Keter and Da'at) are seen as unconscious and conscious manifestations of the same principle, conserving the 10 categories.[4] The sefirot are described as channels of divine creative life force or consciousness through which the unknowable divine essence is revealed to mankind.

In Hasidic philosophy, which has sought to internalise the experience of Jewish mysticism into daily inspiration (devekut), this inner life of the sefirot is explored, and the role they play in man's service of God in this world.

Terminology

The word "Sefirot" is derived from the Hebrew root ס-פ-ר, which forms the

basis for the words book (ספר), story (סיפור), number (מספר) and sapphire (ספיר).[6] Gershom Scholem writes that "as early as the Sefer ha-Bahir it is related to the Hebrew sappir ("sapphire"), for it is the radiance of God which is like that of the sapphire." [a] Some have suggested that the root could derive from the Akkadian word šiprum (meaning message or report) [citation needed]; others have argued that the use of term 'sefirah' was influenced by the Greek word σφαῖρα ("sphere").[7] Both positions are disputed.[8]

Gershom Scholem writes "That many themes are united, or sometimes simply commingled, in this concept is demonstrated by the profusion of terms used to describe it." Scholem states that Kabbalists "employed a wealth of synonyms" and that the Sefirot are "also called ma'amarot and dibburim ("sayings"), shemot ("names"), orot ("lights"), kohot ("powers"), ketarim ("crowns"; since they are "the celestial crowns of the Holy King"), middot in the sense of qualities, madregot ("stages"), levushim ("garments"), marot ("mirrors"), neti'ot ("shoots"), mekorot ("sources"), yamim elyonim or yemei kedem ("supernal or primordial days"), sitrin (i.e., "aspects," found mainly in the Zohar), ha-panim ha-penimiyyot ("the inner faces of God)". Scholem adds that "A long list of other designations for the Sefirot can be found in Herrera, Sha'ar ha-Shamayim, 7:4." [9]

Ein Sof

The Ein Sof (lit: without end) is an important concept in Jewish Kabbalah. Generally translated as "infinity" and "endless", the Ein Sof represents the formless state of the universe before the self-materialization of God. In other words, the Ein Sof is God before he decided to become God as we now know him.[10]

The sefirot are divine emanations that come from the Ein Sof in a manner often described as a flame. The sefirot emanate from above to below. As the first Sefira is closest to Ein Sof, it is the least comprehensible to the human mind, while in turn the last is the best understood because it is closest to the material world that humanity dwells on.[10]

Ten sefirot

Main article: Tree of life (Kabbalah)

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

The path of the flaming sword

The singular, *sefira* (ספירה *səpirā*), may have been a loanword from Koine Greek: *σφαῖρα*, lit. 'sphere'[11]). However, early Kabbalists presented several other etymological possibilities: a "counting" or "enumeration"; or from the same triliteral root: *sefer* "text," *sippur* "recounting a story," *sfar* ("boundary" - ספר), and *sofer*, or *safra* "scribe"; or *sappir* "sapphire." This term had complex connotations within Kabbalah.[4]

The original reference to the sefirot is found in the ancient *Sefer Yetzirah* "The Book of Formation," attributed to the first Jewish patriarch, Abraham. [4] However, the names of the sefirot as given in later Kabbalah are not specified there, but rather are only identified by their attributes "forward," "backward," "right," "left," "down," "up," "light," "darkness," "good" and "evil." Further references to the sefirot, now with their later-accepted

names, are elaborated on in the medieval Kabbalistic text of the Zohar, which is one of the core texts of Kabbalah.

In Cordoveran Kabbalah, the forces of creation are considered autonomous forces that evolve independently. By contrast, in Lurianic or Lurianic Kabbalah (the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria), the sefirot are perceived as a constellation of forces in active dialogue with one another at every stage of that evolution. Luria described the sefirot as complex and dynamically interacting entities known as partzufim "faces," each with its own symbolically human-like persona.[4]

Keter, the Crown, is the first sefirah. It is the superconscious intermediary between God and the other, conscious sefirot. Three different levels, or "heads," are identified within Keter. In some contexts, the highest level of Keter is called "The unknowable head," [12] The second level is "the head of nothingness" (reisha d'ayin), and the third level is "the long head" (reisha d'arich). These three heads correspond to the superconscious levels of faith, pleasure and will in the soul.[4]

The first sefirah, Keter, describes the divine superconscious Will that is beyond conscious intellect. The next three sefirot (Chokmah, Binah and Da'at) describe three levels of conscious divine intellect. In particular, Da'at represents Keter in its knowable form, the concept of knowledge. Will and knowledge are corresponding somewhat dependent opposites. The seven subsequent sefirot (Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malkuth) describe the primary and secondary conscious divine emotions. The sefirot of the left side and the sefirah of Malkuth are feminine, as the female principle in Kabbalah describes a vessel that receives the outward male light, then inwardly nurtures and gives birth to the sefirot below them. Kabbalah sees the human soul as mirroring the divine (after Genesis 1:27, "God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them"), and more widely, all creations as reflections of their life source in the sefirot. Therefore, the sefirot also describe the spiritual life of man, break down man's psychological processes, and constitute the conceptual paradigm in Kabbalah for

understanding everything. This relationship between the soul of man and the divine gives Kabbalah one of its two central metaphors in describing divinity, alongside the other Ohr (light) metaphor. However, Kabbalah repeatedly stresses the need to avoid all corporeal interpretation. Through this, the sefirot are related to the structure of the body and are reformed into partzufim (personas). Underlying the structural purpose of each sefirah is a hidden motivational force which is understood best by comparison with a corresponding psychological state in human spiritual experience.[4]

In its early 12th-century dissemination, Kabbalah garnered criticism from some rabbis who adhered to Jewish philosophy for its alleged introduction of diversity into Jewish monotheism. The seeming plurality of the One God is a result of the spiritual evolution of God's light, which introduced a diversity of emanations from the infinite divine essence. This was necessary due to the inability of humanity to exist in God's infinite presence.[13][b] God does not change; rather, it is our ability to perceive his emanations that is modified. This is stressed in Kabbalah to avoid heretical notions of any plurality in the Godhead. One parable to explain this is the difference between the Ma'or "Luminary" and the ohr "Light" that it emanates, like the difference between the single body of the sun and the multiple rays of sunlight that illuminate a room.[15]

Names in Cordoveran Kabbalah

In Kabbalah, there is a direct correspondence between the Hebrew name of any spiritual or physical phenomenon and its manifestations in the mundane world. The Hebrew name represents the unique essence of the object. This reflects the belief that the universe is created through the metaphorical speech of God, as stated in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. Kabbalah expounds on the names of the sefirot and their nuances, including their gematria (numerical values), to reach an understanding of these emanations of God's essence.[4][16]

In the 16th-century rational synthesis of Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (Cordoveran Kabbalah), the first complete systemization of Kabbalah, the

sefirot are listed from highest to lowest:[16]

Category: Sefirah:

Super-conscious 1 Keter - "Crown"

Conscious intellect 2 Chokmah - "Wisdom"

3 Binah - "Understanding"

Conscious emotions (Primary emotions:)

4 Chesed - "Kindness"

5 Gevurah - "Discipline"

6 Tiferet - "Glory"

(Secondary emotions:)

7 Netzach - "Victory"

8 Hod - "Splendour"

9 Yesod - "Foundation"

(Vessel to bring action:)

10 Malkuth - "Kingdom" Kingship

Man-metaphor in Kabbalah

Main article: Anthropomorphism in Kabbalah

Kabbalah uses subtle anthropomorphic analogies and metaphors to describe God in Judaism, both the God-world relationship, and the inner nature of the divine. These include the metaphor of the soul-body relationship, the functions of human soul-powers, the configuration of human bodily form,

and female-male influences in the divine. Kabbalists repeatedly warn and stress the need to divorce their notions from any corporality, dualism, plurality, or spatial and temporal connotations. As "the Torah speaks in the language of Man", [17] the empirical terms are necessarily imposed upon human experience in this world. Once the analogy is described, its limitations are then related to stripping the kernel of its husk to arrive at a truer conception. Nonetheless, Kabbalists carefully chose their terminology to denote subtle connotations and profound relationships in the divine spiritual influences. More accurately, as they see the emanation of the material world from the spiritual realms, the analogous anthropomorphisms and material metaphors themselves derive through cause and effect from their precise root analogies on High.

Describing the material world below in general, and humans in particular, as created in the "image" of the world above is not restricted in Rabbinic Judaism to Kabbalah, but abounds more widely in Biblical, Midrashic, Talmudic and philosophical literature.[18] Kabbalah extends the Man-metaphor more radically to anthropomorphise particular divine manifestations on high, while repeatedly stressing the need to divest analogies from impure materialistic corporality. Classical proof texts on which it bases its approach include, "From my flesh I envisage God", [19] and the rabbinic analogy "As the soul permeates the whole body...sees but is not seen...sustains the whole body...is pure...abides in the innermost precincts...is unique in the body...does not eat and drink...no man knows where its place is...so the Holy One, Blessed is He..."[20] Together with the metaphor of light, the Man-metaphor is central in Kabbalah. Nonetheless, it too has its limitations, needs qualification, and breaks down if taken as a literal, corporeal comparison. Its limitations include the effect of the body on the soul, while the World effects no change in God; and the distinct, separate origins of the soul and the body, while in relation to God's omnipresence, especially in its acosmic Hasidic development, all creation is nullified in its source.

Inner dimensions and the powers of the soul

Main article: Kochos hanefesh

As all levels of Creation are constructed around the 10 sefirot, their names in Kabbalah describe the particular role each plays in forming reality. These are the external dimensions of the sefirot, describing their functional roles in channelling the divine, creative Ohr (Light) to all levels. As the sefirot are viewed to comprise both metaphorical "lights" and "vessels", their structural role describes the particular identity each sefirah possesses from its characteristic vessel. Underlying this functional structure of the sefirot, each one possesses a hidden, inner spiritual motivation that inspires its activity. This forms the particular characteristic of inner light within each sefirah.

Understanding the sefirot throughout Jewish mysticism is achieved by their correspondence to the human soul. This applies to the outer, Kabbalistic structure of the sefirot. It applies even more to their inner dimensions, which correspond to inner psychological qualities in human perception. Identifying the essential spiritual properties of the soul gives the best insight into their divine source, and in the process reveals the spiritual beauty of the soul. In Hasidic thought these inner dimensions of the sefirot are called the Powers of the Soul (Kochos HaNefesh). Hasidism sought the internalisation of the abstract ideas of Kabbalah, both outwardly in joyful sincerity of dveikus in daily life, acts of loving-kindness and prayer; and inwardly in its profound new articulation of Jewish mystical thought, by relating it to the inner life of man.[21] Articulation of the sefirot in Hasidic philosophy is primarily concerned with their inner dimensions, and exploring the direct, enlivening contribution of each in man's spiritual worship of God.[22] Kabbalah focuses on the esoteric manifestations of God in creation, the vessels of divinity. Hasidut looks at the lights that fill these vessels, how the structures reveal the divine essence, and how this inwardness can be perceived. This difference can be seen in the names of these two stages of Jewish mysticism. "Kabbalah" in Hebrew is derived from "kabal" (to "receive" as a vessel). "Hasidut" is from "chesed" ("loving-kindness"), considered the first and greatest sefirah, also called "Greatness", the wish to reveal and share. The names of the sefirot come from Kabbalah, and describe the Divine effect that each has upon Creation, but not their inner qualities. Hasidic thought uses new descriptive terms for the inner dimensions of the sefirot:[23][24]

Sefirah:

Outer function in Divinity and soul Inner experience:

Inner Divine motivation and human soul response

Above conscious:

Keter-Crown Essence of Keter:

Emunah – "Faith"

(expresses essence of soul in Infinite)

Inner Keter:

Taanug-unconscious source of "Delight"

(soul rooted in delight)

Outer Keter:

Ratzon-unconscious transcendent "Will"

(soul expresses through will)

First revelation of intellect:

Chochmah-Insight of Wisdom Bittul – "Selflessness"

(Revelation inspires self nullification)

Grasped Intellect:

Binah-Understanding Simchah – "Joy"

(Understanding awakens joy)

Assimilated Intellect:

Daat-Knowledge Yichud – "Union"

(Union with idea awakens emotions)[25]

Primary emotion of giving:

Chesed-Loving-kindness Ahavah – "Love" of God and Divine in all things

(Response of Divine giving)

Primary emotion of restriction:

Gevurah-Might/Severity Yirah – "Fear" of God

(Mystical awe of Divinity)

Primary emotion of balance:

**Tiferet-Beautiful harmony[citation needed] Rachamim –
"Mercy/Compassion"**

(Balances kindness with restriction)

Secondary emotion of giving:

Netzach-Victory/Eternity Bitachon – "Confidence"

(Confidence inspires determination)

Secondary emotion of restriction:

Hod-Splendour/Thanksgiving Temimut – "Sincerity/Earnestness"

(Sincere response to Divine Glory)

Secondary emotion of balance:

Yesod-Foundation Emet – "Truth"

(Drive to verify connection in task)

Emotional vessel for action:

Malchut-Kingship Shechinah - "Divine Presence"

(The Highest Light)

The four worlds

Main article: Four Worlds

These ten levels are associated with Kabbalah's four different "Worlds" or planes of existence, the main part from the perspective of the descending "chain of progression" (Seder hishtalshelut), that links the infinite divine Ein Sof with the finite, physical realm. In all Worlds, the 10 sefirot radiate, and are the divine channels through which every level is continuously created from nothing. Since they are the attributes through which the unknowable, infinite divine essence becomes revealed to the creations, all ten emanate in each World. Nonetheless, the structure of the Four Worlds arises because in each one, certain sefirot predominate. Each World is spiritual, apart from the lower aspect of the final World, which is the Asiyah Gashmi ("Physical Asiyah"), the physical Universe. Each World is progressively grosser and further removed from consciousness of the Divine,[26] until in this World it is possible to be unaware of or to deny God. In descending order:

World of Emanation (Hebrew: אֶצִּילוּת, Atzilut): In this level the light of the Ein Sof radiates and is united with its source. Divine Chochmah, the limitless flash of wisdom beyond grasp, predominates.

World of Creation (Hebrew: בְּרִיאָה, Beri'ah): This first world or level, is creation out of nothing--creatio ex nihilo--where the souls and angels have self-awareness, but without form. Divine Binah, the intellectual understanding, predominates.

World of Formation (Hebrew: יְצִירָה, Yetzirah): On this level, creation is related to form. The Divine emotional sefirot of Chesed to Yesod predominate.

World of Action (Hebrew: עֲשִׂיָּה, Assiah): On this level creation is relegated to its physical aspect, the only physical realm and the lowest World, this realm with all its creatures. The Divine Kingship of Malchut predominates, the purpose of Creation.

In the Zohar and elsewhere, there are these four Worlds or planes of existence. In the Lurianic system of Kabbalah, five Worlds are counted, comprising these and a higher, fifth plane, Adam Kadmon-manifest Godhead

level[clarification needed], that mediates between the Ein Sof and the four lower Worlds.

As the four Worlds link the Infinite with this realm, they also enable the soul to ascend in devotion or mystical states, towards the Divine. Each World can be understood as descriptive of dimensional levels of intentionality related to the natural human "desire to receive", and a method for the soul's progress upward toward unity with or return to the Creator. (The terminology of this formulation is based on the exposition of Lurianic Kabbalah by the 20th century Kabbalist Yehuda Ashlag).

See also

Major Arcana

Qliphoth

The path of the flaming sword

References

Notes

See also Ginsburgh 2006

See, for example, the classic passage from the Zohar beginning "Elijah opened his discourse [...]" that is read every Friday afternoon to prepare for the Sabbath, in the Habad Siddur "Tehillat HaShem." [14]

Citations

Khan, Geoffrey (2020). The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew. Vol. 1. Open Book Publishers. ISBN 978-1783746767.

Trachtenberg, Joshua (2004) [1939]. "Glossary of Hebrew Terms". Jewish Magic and Superstition. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 333. ISBN 978-0812218626 – via Sacred-texts.com. Sefirot—the ten creative attributes of God, according to the Kabbalah.

Cohn-Sherbok & Cohn-Sherbok (1994), p. 49.

Ginsburgh (2006).

Kaplan (1997), p. 38.

Chajes, J. H. "Spheres, Sefirot, and the Imaginal Astronomical Discourse of Classical Kabbalah". Harvard Theological Review. 113 (2): 230–262. doi:10.1017/S0017816020000061. ISSN 0017-8160.

Schulte, Christoph (2023). Zimzum: God and the Origin of the World. University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 26. ISBN 978-1-5128-2436-0. Retrieved 19 June 2025.

Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, 1974(?), page 99, "The term Sefirah is not connected with the Greek σφαῖρα ("sphere")"

**Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, 1974(?),
<https://www.betemunah.org/kabbalah-gershom-scholem.pdf>, pages 99-100**

Cohn-Sherbok (2006), p. 9.

Schulte, Christoph (2023). Zimzum: God and the Origin of the World. University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 26. ISBN 978-1-5128-2436-0.

Schneerson (1986): The acronym "RADLA" for this level is identified as the origin of the Torah of Hasidus.

Ginsburgh (2007).

Kurzweil (2011), p. 261.

E.g. Zalman (n.d.), ch. 35.

Schochet (1998), Chapter on the sefirot.

Talmud Berachot 31b and other sources in Chazal

Schochet (1998), ch. 1, "Anthropomorphism and Metaphors".

Job 19:26

Talmud Berachot 10a, Midrash Tehillim 103:4,5, Tikunei Zohar 13:28a and later Kabbalistic commentary. Cited in footnote 7, chapter 1, Mystical

Concepts in Chassidism

Overview of Chassidut from www.inner.org. Retrieved 1 November 2009

The Ten Sefirot-Introduction from www.inner.org. Retrieved 1 November 2009

"Sefirah" in Glossary of Kabbalah and Chassidut at www.inner.org. Retrieved 1 November 2009

The Powers of the Soul explained at www.inner.org. Retrieved 1 November 2009

Miller (n.d.).

"Neohasid.org's Tu Bish'vat Haggadah" (PDF). Retrieved 2020-12-07.

Works cited

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan; Cohn-Sherbok, Lavinia (1994). Jewish & Christian Mysticism: An Introduction. Continuum. ISBN 978-0-85244-259-3.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan (2006). Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism: An Introductory Anthology. Oxford: Oneworld Publications. ISBN 978-1-85168-454-0.

Ginsburgh, Yitzchak (2006). Genuth, Moshe (ed.). What You Need to Know about Kabbalah. Jerusalem: Gal Einai Institute. ISBN 965-7146-119.

Ginsburgh, Yitzchak (2007). Kabbalah and Meditation for the Nations. Canada and Israel: Gal Einai. ISBN 978-965-7146-125.

Kaplan, Aryeh (1997). Sepher Yetzirah. Weiser Books. ISBN 978-0-87728-855-8.

Kurzweil, A. (2011). Kabbalah For Dummies. Wiley. ISBN 978-1-118-06862-5.

Miller, Moshe (n.d.). "Emanations Interact: The sefirot are understood in the shape of the human form". Chabad.org. Kabbalah Online.

Schneerson, Menachem Mendel (1986). On the Essence of Chassidus. Translated by Y. Greenberg; S. S. Handelman. Kehot Publication Society. ISBN 978-0-8266-0470-5.

Schochet, Jacob Immanuel (1998). Mystical Concepts in Chassidism: An

Introduction to Kabbalistic Concepts and Doctrines (3rd ed.). Kehot. ISBN 0-8266-0412-9.

Zalman, HaRav Shneur (n.d.). Mindel, Nissan; Schochet, Ya'acov Immanuel (eds.). Tanya: Likutei Amarim: Sefer Shel Benonim [It Was Taught: Collected Sayings: Book of Intermediates] (Bi-Lingual Hebrew-English ed.). Kehot Publishing.

Further reading

Ashlag, Yehuda (1977). Berg, Philip S. (ed.). An Entrance to the Tree of Life: A Key to the Portals of Jewish Mysticism. Jerusalem: Research Centre of Kabbalah. ISBN 978-0-943688-35-0.

Chajes, J. H. (2022). The Kabbalistic Tree. Pennsylvania State University Press. ISBN 978-0-271-09345-1.

Fortune, Dion (2009) [1957]. The Mystical Qabalah. London: Ernest Benn. ISBN 978-0-510-41001-8.

Freer, Ian (2013). The Pagan Eden: The Assyrian Origins of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Collective Ink. ISBN 978-1-78099-961-6.

Gray, William G. (1997). Qabalistic Concepts: Living the Tree. Red Wheel Weiser. ISBN 978-1-57863-000-4.

Halevi, Z'ev ben Shimon (2016). The Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Bet El Trust. ISBN 978-1-909171-41-1.

Kaplan, Aryeh, ed. (1995). The Bahir. Translated by Aryeh Kaplan. Aronson. ISBN 1-56821-383-2.

Macdonald, Michael-Albion (1986). The Secret of Secrets: The Unwritten Mysteries of Esoteric Qabalah. Heptangle Books. ISBN 978-0-935214-08-6.

Scholem, Gershom (1996). On The Kabbalah and its Symbolism. Schocken. ISBN 0-8052-1051-2.

Shulman, Yaacov Dovid (1996). The Sefirot: Ten Emanations of Divine Power. Jason Aronson. ISBN 978-1-56821-929-5.

External links

The Ten Sefirot: Introduction

Diagram of 10 Sefirot and Attributes

Sefirotic Systems in the Sefer Yetsira, Bahir and Post-Zohar Kabbalah

vte

Jews and Judaism

Categories: SefirotConcepts in metaphysicsJewish mysticismKabbalistic words and phrasesReligious philosophical conceptsTrees in mythologyReligious diagrams

This page was last edited on 7 November 2025, at 16:06 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Hebrew alphabet

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

This article is about the alphabet derived from the Aramaic alphabet (135 CE – present). For the original Hebrew alphabet derived directly from the Phoenician alphabet (10th century BCE – 135 CE), see Paleo-Hebrew alphabet. For the descendant script of the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet, see Samaritan script. For the insect, see Hebrew character.

Hebrew alphabet

Script type Abjad primarily, alphabet

Period 2nd–1st century BCE to present[1]

Direction Right-to-left

Languages Hebrew; derivations used for Yiddish, Ladino, Mozarabic, Levantine Arabic, Aramaic, Knaanic, other Jewish languages

Related scripts

Parent systems

Egyptian hieroglyphs

Proto-Sinaitic script

Phoenician alphabet

Aramaic alphabet

Hebrew alphabet

Child systems

Yiddish alphabet

Square Maalouli alphabet

Sister systems

Nabataean

Syriac

Palmyrene

Edessan

Hatran

Elymaic

Mandaic

Pahlavi

Kharosthi

ISO 15924

ISO 15924 Hebr (125), Hebrew

Unicode

Unicode alias Hebrew

Unicode range

U+0590 to U+05FF

Hebrew,

U+FB1D to U+FB4F

Alphabetic Presentation Forms

This article contains phonetic transcriptions in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). For an introductory guide on IPA symbols, see Help:IPA. For the distinction between [], / and ⟨ ⟩, see IPA § Brackets and transcription delimiters.

דלִּיֵּן

This article contains Hebrew text. Without proper rendering support, you may see question marks, boxes, or other symbols instead of Hebrew letters.

History of the alphabet

The Hebrew alphabet (Hebrew: אֲלֶפֶת־יִבְרִית עִבְרִית,[a] Alefbet ivri), known variously by scholars as the Ktav Ashuri, Jewish script, square script and block script, is a unicameral abjad script used in the writing of the Hebrew language. Alphabets based on the Hebrew script are used to write other Jewish languages, most notably Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Persian. In modern Hebrew, vowels are increasingly introduced. Hebrew script is used informally in Israel to write Levantine Arabic, especially among Druze.[2][3][4] The script is an offshoot of the Imperial Aramaic alphabet, which flourished during the Achaemenid Empire, and which itself derives from the Phoenician alphabet.

Historically, a different abjad script was used to write Hebrew: the original, old Hebrew script, now known as the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet, has been largely preserved in a variant form as the Samaritan alphabet, and is still used by the Samaritans. The present Jewish script or square script, on the contrary, is a stylized form of the Aramaic alphabet and was technically known by Jewish sages as Ashurit (lit. 'Assyrian script'), since its origins were known to be from Assyria (Mesopotamia).[5]

Various styles (in current terms, fonts) of representation of the Jewish script

letters described in this article also exist, including a variety of cursive Hebrew styles. In the remainder of this article, the term Hebrew alphabet refers to the square script unless otherwise indicated.

The Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters. It does not have case. Five letters have different forms when used at the end of a word. Hebrew is written from right to left. Originally, the alphabet was an abjad consisting only of consonants, but is now considered an impure abjad. As with other abjads, such as the Arabic alphabet, during its centuries-long use scribes devised means of indicating vowel sounds by separate vowel points, known in Hebrew as *niqqud*. In both biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, the letters א ה ו י can also function as *matres lectionis*, which is when certain consonants are used to indicate vowels. There is a trend in Modern Hebrew towards the use of *matres lectionis* to indicate vowels that have traditionally gone unwritten, a practice known as *full spelling*.

The Yiddish alphabet, a modified version of the Hebrew alphabet used to write Yiddish, is a true alphabet, with all vowels rendered in the spelling, except in the case of inherited Hebrew words, which typically retain their Hebrew consonant-only spellings.

The Arabic and Hebrew alphabets have similarities in *acrophony* because it is said that they are both derived from the Aramaic alphabet, which in turn derives from the Phoenician alphabet, both being slight regional variations of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet used in ancient times to write the various Canaanite languages (including Hebrew, Moabite, Phoenician, Punic, et cetera).

History

Paleo-Hebrew alphabet containing 22 letters, period, geresh, and gershayim

The Aleppo Codex, a tenth-century Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. Book of Joshua 1:1

Main article: History of the Hebrew alphabet

The Canaanite dialects were largely indistinguishable before around 1000 BCE.[6] An example of related early Semitic inscriptions from the area include the tenth-century Gezer calendar over which scholars are divided as to whether its language is Hebrew or Phoenician and whether the script is Proto-Canaanite or Paleo-Hebrew.[7][8][9][10][11][12]

A Hebrew variant of the Proto-Canaanite alphabet, called the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet by scholars, began to emerge around 800 BCE.[13] An example is the Siloam inscription (c. 700 BCE).[14]

The Paleo-Hebrew alphabet was used in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Following the Babylonian exile of the Kingdom of Judah in the 6th century BCE, Jews began using a form of the Imperial Aramaic alphabet, another offshoot of the same family of scripts, which flourished during the Achaemenid Empire (and which in turn had been adopted from the Assyrians). The Samaritans, who remained in the Land of Israel, continued to use the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet. During the 3rd century BCE (after the end of the Achaemenid Empire in 330 BCE), Jews began to use a stylized, "square" form of the Imperial Aramaic alphabet,[15] while the Samaritans continued to use a form of the Paleo-Hebrew script called the Samaritan alphabet. For a few centuries, Jews used both scripts (although use of Paleo-Hebrew was limited then) before eventually, after the 1st century BCE, settling on the square Assyrian form.[citation needed]

The square Hebrew alphabet was later adapted and used for writing languages of the Jewish diaspora – such as Karaim, the Judeo-Arabic languages, Judaeo-Spanish, and Yiddish. The Hebrew alphabet continued in use for scholarly writing in Hebrew and came again into everyday use with the rebirth of the Hebrew language as a spoken language in the 18th and

19th centuries, especially in Israel.[citation needed]

Description

א • ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ ל מ ם נ ן ס ע פ ף צ ץ ק ר ש ת

Features

Abjad**Mater lectionis****Begadkefat**

Variants

Cursive**Rashi****Solitreo****Braille**

Numerals

Gematria**Numeration**

Ancillaries

Diacritics**Punctuation****Cantillation**

Translit.

Romanization of Hebrew**Hebraization of English****IPA****ISO**

Computers

Keyboard**Unicode and HTML**

General

In the traditional form, the Hebrew alphabet is an abjad consisting only of consonants, written from right to left. It has 22 letters, five of which use different forms at the end of a word.

Vowels

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by

adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

In the traditional form, vowels are indicated by the weak consonants Aleph (א), He (ה), Waw/Vav (ו), or Yodh (י) serving as vowel letters, or matres lectionis: the letter is combined with a previous vowel and becomes silent, or by imitation of such cases in the spelling of other forms. Also, a system of vowel points to indicate vowels (diacritics), called niqqud, was developed. In modern forms of the alphabet, as in the case of Yiddish and to some extent Modern Hebrew, vowels may be indicated. Today, the trend is toward full spelling with the weak letters acting as true vowels.

When used to write Yiddish, vowels are indicated, using certain letters, either with niqqud diacritics (e.g. אָ or יִ) or without (e.g. װ or י), except for Hebrew words, which in Yiddish are written in their Hebrew spelling.

To preserve the proper vowel sounds, scholars developed several different sets of vocalization and diacritical symbols called nequdot (נקודות, literally "points"). One of these, the Tiberian system, eventually prevailed. Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, and his family for several generations, are credited for refining and maintaining the system. These points are normally used only for special purposes, such as Biblical books intended for study, in poetry or when teaching the language to children. The Tiberian system also includes a set of cantillation marks, called trope or te'amim, used to indicate how scriptural passages should be chanted in synagogue recitations of scripture (although these marks do not appear in the scrolls). In everyday writing of modern Hebrew, niqqud are absent; however, patterns of how words are derived from Hebrew roots (called shorashim or triliterals) allow Hebrew speakers to determine the vowel-structure of a given word from its consonants based on the word's context and part of speech.

Alphabet

Unlike the Paleo-Hebrew writing script, the modern Hebrew script has five letters that have special final forms,[c] called sofit (Hebrew: סופית, meaning

in this context "final" or "ending") form, used only at the end of a word, somewhat as in the Greek or in the Arabic and Mandaic alphabets.[b] These are shown below the normal form in the following table (letter names are Unicode standard[16][17]). Although Hebrew is read and written from right to left, the following table shows the letters in order from left to right:

Alef

Bet

Gimel Dalet

He

Waw/Vav

Zayin Chet Tet Yod Kaf

א ב ג ד ה ו ז ח ט י כ

ך

Lamed Mem

Nun

Samech Ayin

Pe

Tsadi Qof Resh

Shin

Tav

ל מ נ ס ע פ צ ק ר ש ת

ם ן ף ץ

Order

As far back as the 13th century BCE, ancient Hebrew abecedaries indicate a

slightly different ordering of the alphabet. The Zayit Stone,[18] Izbet Sartah ostrakon,[19] and one inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud[20] each contain a number of reverse letter orders; such as vav-he, chet-zayin, pe-ayin, etc.

A reversal to pe-ayin can be clearly seen in the Book of Lamentations, whose first four chapters are ordered as alphabetical acrostics. In the Masoretic Text, the first chapter has the now-usual ayin-pe ordering, and the second, third and fourth chapters exhibit pe-ayin.[21] In the Dead Sea Scrolls version (4QLam/4Q111), reversed ordering also appears in the first chapter (i.e. in all the first four chapters).[22] The fact that these chapters follow the pre-exilic pe-ayin order is evidence for them being written shortly after the events described, rather than being later, post-exilic compositions.[23][24][25]

Pronunciation

Alphabet

Main articles: Biblical Hebrew phonology, Modern Hebrew phonology, International Phonetic Alphabet for Hebrew, and Yiddish phonology

The descriptions that follow are based on the pronunciation of modern standard Israeli Hebrew.

letter	IPA	Name of letter	Pronunciation
Unicode[16][17]		Hebrew[26]	Modern Hebrew pronunciation
		Yiddish / Ashkenazi	
		Sephardi	
		Yemenite	

Approximate western European equivalent[27]

א [ø], [ʔ] Alef אֵלֶף /alef/ /ʔaləf/ /ʔalef/ /'olaf/ When ʔ, as in button ['bʌʔn] or clipboard [ˌklɪpˈbɔɪd]

ב [b] Bet בֵּית /bet/ /beɪs/, /beɪz/ /bet/ /beθ/ b as in black

ב [v] Bet בֵּית /vet/ /veɪs/, /veɪz/ /vet/ /veθ/ v as in vogue

ג [g] Gimel גִּמְלָה /'gimel/ /'gɪməl/ /'gimel/ /'dʒimel/ g as in gourd

ג [ɣ] Gimel גִּמְלָה /'ɣimel/ /'ɣimel/ gh as in Arabic ghoul

ד [d] Dalet דָּלֶת /'dalet/, /'daleɪd/ /'daləd/, /'daləs/ /'dalet/ /'dolaθ/ d as in doll

ד [ð] Dalet דָּלֶת /'ðalet/ /'ðolaθ/ th as in that

ה [h] He הֵא /he/, /hej/ /heɪ/ /he/ /he/ h as in hold

ו [v] Vav וָ /vav/ /vɔv/ /vav/ /wow/ v as in vogue

ז [z] Zayin זַיִן /'zajin/, /'za.in/ /'zajɪn/ /'zajin/ /'zajin/ z as in zoo

ח [χ] Chet חֵת /χet/ /χes/ /ħet/ /ħeθ/ ch as in Bach

ט [t] Tet טֵת /tet/ /tes/ /tət/ /tʰeθ/ t as in tool

י [j] Yod יוֹד /jod/, /jud/ /jud/ /jud/ /jøð/ y as in yolk

כ [k] Kaf כָּף /kaf/ /kɔf/ /kaf/ /kaf/ k as in king

כּ [χ] Kaf כָּף /χaf/ /χɔf/ /χaf/ /xaf/ ch as in bach

ך [k] Kaf סּוּפִית כָּף /kaf sofit/ /'laŋgə kɔf/ /kaf sofit/ /kaf sɔ'fiθ/ k as in king

ךּ [x]~[χ] Kaf סּוּפִית כָּף /χaf sofit/ /'laŋgə χɔf/ /χaf sofit/ /xaf sɔ'fiθ/ ch as in bach

ל [l] Lamed לָמֶד /'lamɛd/ /'laməd/ /'lamɛd/ /'lomeð/
l as in luck

מ [m] Mem מֶם /mem/ /mɛm/ /mɛm/ /mem/ m as
in mother

ם מֶם סוֹפִית /mem sofit/ /'ʃɒs mɛm/ /mɛm sofit/ /mem sɒ'fiθ/

נ [n] Nun נוֹן /nun/ /nʊn/ /nun/ /nun/ n as in night

ן נוֹן סוֹפִית /nun sofit/ /'lɒŋgə nʊn/ /nun sofit/ /nun sɒ'fiθ/

ס [s] Samekh סָמֶךְ /'sameɪχ/ /'saməχ/ /'sameɪχ/ /'sɒmæχ/
s as in sight

ע [ʔ]~[ʕ], [ø] Ayin עֵין /ajin/, /ʔa.in/ /ajɪn/ /ajin/ /'ʕajin/ When
ʔ, as in button ['bʌʔn] or clipboard [ˌklɪʔ'bɔɪd]. When ʕ, no English
equivalent.

פ [p] Pe פֶּא /pe/, /pej/ /pɛɪ/ /pe/ /pe/ p as in pine

ף פֶּא /fe/, /fej/ /fɛɪ/ /fe/ /fe/ f as in fine

ף פֶּא סוֹפִית /pe sofit/, /pej sofit/ /'lɒŋgə pɛɪ/ /pe sofit/ /pe sɒ
'fiθ/ p as in pine

ף פֶּא סוֹפִית /fe sofit/, /fej sofit/ /'lɒŋgə fɛɪ/ /fe sofit/ /fe sɒ'fiθ/
f as in fine

צ [ts] Tsadi צָדִי /'tsadi/ /'tsadi/, /'tsadɪk/ /'tsadik/ /'sʔoði/
ts as in cats

ץ צָדִי סוֹפִית /'tsadi sofit/ /'lɒŋgə 'tsadɪk/, /'lɒŋgə 'tsadək/ /'tsadik sofit/
'sʔoði sɒ'fiθ/

ק [k] Qof קוֹף /kuf/, /kof/ /kuf/ /kuf/ /gɒf/ k as in king

ר [ʁ] Resh רֵישׁ /ʁɛʃ/ /ʁɛɪʃ/ /rɛʃ/ /rɛʃ/ r as in French ⟨r⟩

שׁ [ʃ] Shin שֵׁין /ʃɪn/ /ʃɪm/ /ʃɪn/ /ʃɪn/ sh as in shower

שׂ [s] שֵׁין /sin/ /sɪm/ /sin/ /sin/ s as in sour

ת [t] Tav ת /tav/, /taf/ /tɔv/, /tɔf/ /tav/ /tow/ t as in tool

ת [θ] ת /sɔv/, /sɔf/ /θav/ /θow/ th as in thin

By analogy with the other dotted/dotless pairs, dotless tav, ת, would be expected to be pronounced /θ/ (voiceless dental fricative), and dotless dalet ד as /ð/ (voiced dental fricative), but these were lost among most Jews due to these sounds not existing in the countries where they lived (such as in nearly all of Eastern Europe). Yiddish modified /θ/ to /s/ (cf. seseo in Spanish), but in modern Israeli Hebrew, it is simply pronounced /t/. Likewise, historical /ð/ is simply pronounced /d/.^[citation needed]

Shin and sin

Further information: Shin (letter)

Shin and sin are represented by the same letter, ש, but are two separate phonemes. When vowel diacritics are used, the two phonemes are differentiated with a shin-dot or sin-dot; the shin-dot is above the upper-right side of the letter, and the sin-dot is above the upper-left side of the letter.^[citation needed]

Symbol	Name	Transliteration	IPA	Example
ש (right dot)	shin	sh	/ʃ/	shower
ש (left dot)	sin	s	/s/	sour

Historically, left-dot-sin corresponds to Proto-Semitic *ś, which in biblical-Judaic-Hebrew corresponded to the voiceless alveolar lateral fricative /ɬ/ (or /š/).^[28]

Dagesh

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by

adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Main article: Dagesh

See also: Begadkefat

Historically, the consonants ב bet, ג gimmel, ד daleth, כ kaf, פ pe and ת tav each had two sounds: one hard (plosive), and one soft (fricative), depending on the position of the letter and other[which?] factors. When vowel diacritics are used, the hard sounds are indicated by a central dot called dagesh (שׁגד), while the soft sounds lack a dagesh. In modern Hebrew, however, the dagesh only changes the pronunciation of ב bet, כ kaf, and פ pe, and does not affect the name of the letter. The differences are as follows:

Name		With dagesh		Without dagesh	
Symbol	Transliteration	IPA	Example	Symbol	Transliteration
	IPA	Example			
bet/vet	ב	b	/b/ ban	ב	v, ḇ /v/ van
kaf	[29]ך כ	k	/k/ kangaroo	ך כ	kh, ch, ḵ, x /χ/ loch
pe	ף פ	p	/p/ pine	ף פ	f, ṗ, ph /f/ fine

In other dialects (mainly liturgical) there are variations from this pattern.

In some Sephardi and Mizrahi dialects, bet without dagesh is pronounced [b], like bet with dagesh

In Syrian and Yemenite Hebrew, gimel without dagesh is pronounced [ɣ].

In Yemenite Hebrew, and in the Iraqi pronunciation of the word Adonai, dalet without dagesh is pronounced [ð] as in these

In Ashkenazi Hebrew, as well as Krymchaki Hebrew, tav without dagesh is pronounced [s] as in silk

In Iraqi and Yemenite Hebrew, and formerly in some other dialects, tav without dagesh is pronounced [θ] as in thick

Sounds represented with diacritic geresh

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Main articles: Geresh and Hebraization of English

The sounds [tʃ], [d͡ʒ], [ʒ], written ⟨'צ⟩, ⟨'ג⟩, ⟨'ד⟩, and [w], non-standardly sometimes transliterated ⟨װ⟩, are often found in slang and loanwords that are part of the everyday Hebrew colloquial vocabulary. The symbol resembling an apostrophe after the Hebrew letter modifies the pronunciation of the letter and is called a geresh.

Hebrew slang and loanwords

Name	Symbol	IPA	Transliteration	Example
Gimel with a geresh	ג'	[d͡ʒ]	ğ[30] ġáḥnun	[ˈd͡ʒaxnun] גִּחְנוֹן
Zayin with a geresh	ז'	[ʒ]	ž[30] koláž [koˈlaʒ]	קולָאז' קולאז'
Tsadi with a geresh	צ'	[tʃ]	č[30] čupár (treat)	[tʃuˈpar] צ'ופֶר

Vav with a geresh

or double Vav	װ or װ' (non standard)	[w]	w	awánta (boastful act)
	[aˈwanta]			אַװאַנטה

The pronunciation of the following letters can also be modified with the geresh diacritic. The represented sounds are however foreign to Hebrew phonology, i.e., these symbols mainly represent sounds in foreign words or names when transliterated with the Hebrew alphabet, and not loanwords.

Transliteration of non-native sounds

Name	Symbol	IPA	Arabic letter	Example	Comment
------	--------	-----	---------------	---------	---------

Dalet with a geresh	ד'	[ð]	Dhāl (ذ)
---------------------	----	-----	----------

Voiced th Dhū al-Ḥijjah (ذو الحجة) ד'ו אל-חיג'ה

Also used for English voiced "th"

Often a simple ד is written.

Tav with a geresh	ת'	[θ]	Thā' (ث)
-------------------	----	-----	----------

Voiceless th Thurston ת'רסטון

Chet with a geresh	ח'	[χ]	Khā' (خ)	Sheikh (شيخ)	שייח'
--------------------	----	-----	----------	--------------	-------

Unlike the other sounds in this table, the sound [χ] represented by ח' is indeed a native sound in Hebrew; the geresh is however used only when transliteration must distinguish between [χ] and [h], in which case ח' transliterates the former and ח the latter, whereas in everyday usage ח without geresh is pronounced [h] only dialectically but [χ] commonly.

Ayin with a geresh

or

Resh with a geresh	ע'
--------------------	----

or

ר'	[ʁ]	Ghayn (غ)	Ghajar (عجر);
----	-----	-----------	---------------

Ghalib (غالب) ע'ג'ר

ר'אלב The guidelines specified by the Academy of the Hebrew Language prefer Resh with a geresh (ר'); however, this guideline is not universally followed

Geresh is also used to denote an abbreviation consisting of a single Hebrew letter, while gershayim (a doubled geresh) are used to denote acronyms pronounced as a string of letters; geresh and gershayim are also used to

denote Hebrew numerals consisting of a single Hebrew letter or of multiple Hebrew letters, respectively. Geresh is also the name of a cantillation mark used for Torah recitation, though its visual appearance and function are different in that context.

Identical pronunciation

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

In much of Israel's general population, especially where Ashkenazic pronunciation is prevalent, many letters have the same pronunciation. They are as follows:

Letters	Transliteration	Pronunciation (IPA)
---------	-----------------	---------------------

א		
---	--	--

Alef*	א	
-------	---	--

Ayin*	א	not
-------	---	-----

transliterated	א	Usually when in medial word position:
----------------	---	---------------------------------------

/./		
-----	--	--

(separation of vowels in a hiatus)

In initial, final, or sometimes medial word position:

silent

alternatingly

'	א	/ʔ/
---	---	-----

(glottal plosive)

ב

Bet (without dagesh) Vet ב

Vav ו **v** /v/

פ

Chet* ח

Kaf (without dagesh)

Khaf* kh/ch/h כ **/χ/**

ט

Tet ט

Tav ת **t** /t/

צ

Kaf (with dagesh) ק

Qof ק **k** /k/

ס

Samekh ש **ś**

Sin (with left dot) ס **s** /s/

צ

Tsadi* צ **ts**

Tav-Samekh* and תש **ts**

Tav-Sin* ts/tz **/ts/**

ש

Tsadi (with geresh) שש **ts**

Tet-Shin* and תש **ts**

Tav-Shin* ch/tsh (chair) /tʃ/

*** Varyingly**

Ancient Hebrew pronunciation

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Some of the variations in sound mentioned above are due to a systematic feature of Ancient Hebrew. The six consonants /b g d k p t/ were pronounced differently depending on their position. These letters were also called BeGeD KeFeT letters /beɪɡed'kefet/. The full details are very complex; this summary omits some points. They were pronounced as plosives [b g d k p t] at the beginning of a syllable, or when doubled. They were pronounced as fricatives [v ɣ ð x f θ] when preceded by a vowel (sometimes indicated with a macron, **ḇ ḡ ḏ ḵ ṗ ṭ). The plosive and double pronunciations were indicated by the dagesh. In Modern Hebrew the sounds **ḏ** and **ḡ** have reverted to [d] and [g], respectively, and **ṭ** has become [t], so only the remaining three consonants /b k p/ show variation. **ʁ** resh may have also been a "doubled" letter, making the list BeGeD KePoReT. (Sefer Yetzirah, 4:1)**

ḥ chet and ʕ ayin represented the pharyngeal fricatives /ħ/ and /ʕ/, respectively, ʁ tsadi represented the emphatic consonant /sˤ/, ʔ tet represented the emphatic consonant /tˤ/, and ʁ qof represented the uvular plosive /q/. All these are common Semitic consonants.

ś sin (the /s/ variant of ש shin) was originally different from both ש shin and ס samekh, but had become /s/ the same as ס samekh by the time the vowel pointing was devised. Because of cognates with other Semitic languages, this phoneme is known to have originally been a lateral consonant, most likely the voiceless alveolar lateral fricative /ɬ/ (the sound of modern Welsh ll) or the voiceless alveolar lateral affricate /tɬ/ (like Náhuatl tl).

Regional and historical variation

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

The following table contains the pronunciation of the Hebrew letters in reconstructed historical forms and dialects using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The apostrophe-looking symbol after some letters is not a yud but a geresh. It is used for loanwords with non-native Hebrew sounds. The dot in the middle of some of the letters, called a dagesh kal, also modifies the sounds of the letters כ, פ and צ in modern Hebrew (in some forms of Hebrew it modifies also the sounds of the letters ג, ט and/or ת; the dagesh chazak – orthographically indistinguishable from the dagesh kal – designates gemination, which today is realized only rarely – e.g. in biblical recitations or when using Arabic loanwords).

Symbol Pronunciation

Israeli Ashkenazi Sephardi Yemenite Reconstructed Imperial
Aramaic

(ancestral script)

Tiberian Mishnaic Biblical

א	[ʔ, –]	[–]	[ʔ, –]	[ʔ, –]	[ʔ, –]	[ʔ, –]	[ʔ]
ב	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]	[b]
ב	[v]	[v~ʔ]	[b~β~v]	[v]	[v]	[β]	[β]
ג	[g]	[g~ǵ]	[g]	[dʒ]	[g]	[g]	[g]
ג	[g~ʔ]	[ʔ]	[ʔ]	[ʔ]	[ʔ]		

ד	[d]	[d~ḏ]	[ḏ]	[ḏ]	[ḏ]	[ḏ]	[ḏ]
ט	[ḏ~ṭ]	[ṭ]	[ṭ]	[ṭ]	[ṭ]		
ה	[h~ʔ, -]	[h, -]	[h, -]	[h, -]	[h, -]	[h, -]	[h]
ו	[v]	[v~ṽ]	[v]	[w]	[w]	[w]	[w]
ז	[u:]	[u:]	[u:]	[u(:)]	?	?	?
ח	[o:]	[əu, eu]	[o:]	[ø(:)]	?	?	?
צ	[z]	[z~ṣ]	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]	[z]
כ	[x~χ]	[x]	[ħ]	[ħ]	[ħ]	[ħ]	[ħ, χ]
ק	[t]	[t]	[ṭ]	[ṭ] (1)	[ṭ] (2)		[ṭ] (3)
ל	[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]	[j]
י	[i:]	[i:]	[i:]	[i(:)]	?	?	?
כּ	[k]	[k]	[k]	[k]	[k]	[k]	[kʰ]
ך	[x~χ]	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]
ל	[l]	[l~ɫ]	[l]	[l]	[l]	[l]	[l]
מ	[m]	[m]	[m]	[m]	[m]	[m]	[m]
נ	[n]	[n]	[ṇ]	[ṇ]	[ṇ]	[ṇ]	[ṇ]
ס	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]
ע	[ʕ, -]	[-]	[ʕ, ʔ, -]	[ʕ]	[ʕ]	[ʕ]	[ʕ, ʔ]
פ	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]	[p]
ף	[f]	[f]	[f]	[f]	[f]	[ϕ]	[ϕ]
צ	[ts]	[ts]	[ts]	[s] (1)	[s] (2)		[sʔ] ,
ק	[k]	[k]	[k]	[g]	[q]	[q]	[q]

ר	[ʁ~ʁ]	[ɹ]~[ʀ]	[r]~[ɹ]	[r]~[ɹ]	[ʀ]	[r]	[ɹ]
ש	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]	[ʃ]
ש	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[s]	[ʃ]
ת	[t]	[t]	[t]	[t̪]	[t̪]	[t̪]	[t̪]
ת	[s]	[θ]	[θ]	[θ]	[θ]		

velarized or pharyngealized

pharyngealized

sometimes said to be ejective but more likely glottalized.

Vowels

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Matres lectionis

Main article: Mater lectionis

א alef, ו ayin, ו waw/vav and י yod are letters that can sometimes indicate a vowel instead of a consonant (which would be, respectively, /ʔ/, /ʕ/, /v/ and /j/). When they do, ו and י are considered to constitute part of the vowel designation in combination with a niqqud symbol – a vowel diacritic (whether or not the diacritic is marked), whereas א and ו are considered to be mute, their role being purely indicative of the non-marked vowel.

Letter	Name
--------	------

of letter Consonant

indicated

when letter

consonantal Vowel

designationName of

vowel designation Indicated

Vowel

א alef /ʔ/ — — ê, ê, â, â, ô

ע ayin /ʔ/ or /ʕ/ — — ê, ê, â, â, ô

ו waw/vav /w/ or /v/ ו הֹלָם maléô

שׁ shurúq û

י yud /j/ י הִירֵץ malé î

ֿ tseré malé ê, ê

Vowel points

Niqqud is the system of dots that help determine vowels and consonants. In Hebrew, all forms of niqqud are often omitted in writing, except for children's books, prayer books, poetry, foreign words, and words which would be ambiguous to pronounce. Israeli Hebrew has five vowel phonemes, /i e a o u/, but many more written symbols for them:

NameSymbol Written Position Israeli Hebrew

IPA Transliteration English

example

Hiriq vowel written below consonant [i] i meet

Tsere	vowel written below consonant	[ɛ], ([ɛj] with succeeding yod)	eh (precise pronunciation); ei (imprecise due to modern pronunciation, even if with succeeding yod – see Note 2)	bed, penguin
Segol	vowel written below consonant	[ɛ]	e	men
Patach	vowel written below consonant	[ä]	a	father
Kamatz	vowel written below consonant	[ä], (or [ɔ])	ah, (or oh)	father, login
Holam Haser	vowel written above consonant	[ɔ]	o	home
Holam Male	isolated vowel written on its own			
Shuruk	isolated vowel written on its own	[u]	u	food
Kubutz	vowel written below consonant			

Note 1: The circle represents whatever Hebrew letter is used.

Note 2: The pronunciation of tsere and sometimes segol – with or without the letter yod – is sometimes ei in Modern Hebrew. This is not correct in the normative pronunciation and not consistent in the spoken language.[31]

Note 3: The dagesh, mappiq, and shuruk have different functions, even though they look the same.

Note 4: The letter ם (waw/vav) is used since it can only be represented by that letter.

Meteg

Main article: Meteg

By adding a vertical line (called Meteg) underneath the letter and to the left of the vowel point, the vowel is made long. The meteg is only used in Biblical Hebrew, not Modern Hebrew.

Sh'va

Main article: Sh'va

By adding two vertical dots (called sh'va) underneath the letter, the vowel is made very short. When sh'va is placed on the first letter of the word, mostly it is "è" (but in some instances, it makes the first letter silent without a vowel (vowel-less): e.g. | wè to "w").

Name	Symbol	Israeli Hebrew
------	--------	----------------

IPA	Transliteration	English
-----	-----------------	---------

example

Shva	[ɐ] or ø	apostrophe, e,
------	----------	----------------

or silent	met or silent
-----------	---------------

Reduced Segol	[ɐ]	e	met
---------------	-----	---	-----

Reduced Patach	[ä]	a	cat
----------------	-----	---	-----

Reduced Kamatz	[ɔ]	o	on
----------------	-----	---	----

Comparison table

Vowel comparison table [32]

Vowel length

(phonetically not manifested in Israeli Hebrew)	IPA	Transliteration
English		

example

Long	Short	Very Short
------	-------	------------

ֹ	ֻ	ְ	[ä]	a	fall
---	---	---	-----	---	------

ֱ	ִ	ֵ	[ɐ]	e	men
---	---	---	-----	---	-----

יֹ	o	[ɔ]	o	joke
יֹ	u	[u]	u	duty
יִ	i	[i]	i	media

Note I: By adding two vertical dots (sh'va) , the vowel is made very short.

Note II: The short o and long a have the same niqqud.

Note III: The short o is usually promoted to a long o in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.

Note IV: The short u is usually promoted to a long u in Israeli writing for the sake of disambiguation.

Gershayim

Main article: Gershayim

The symbol ״ is called a gershayim and is a punctuation mark used in the Hebrew language to denote acronyms. It is written before the last letter in the acronym, e.g. ת״ר. Gershayim is also the name of a cantillation mark in the reading of the Torah, printed above the accented letter, e.g. מִן.

Stylistic variants

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Further information: Cursive Hebrew, Rashi script, Ashuri alphabet, and History of the Hebrew alphabet

The following table displays typographic and chirographic variants of each

letter. For the letters that have different forms in word-final position, the final forms are displayed beneath the regular forms.

The block (square, or print form) and cursive (handwritten form) are the only variants in widespread contemporary use. Rashi is also used, for historical reasons, in a handful of standard texts.

Hebrew alphabet (135 CE – present): Variants

Letter

name

(Unicode)

Contemporary Early modern Ancestral

Block

serif Block sans-serif Block mono-spaced Cursive Rashi Phoenician
Paleo-Hebrew Aramaic

Alef א א א א Alef

Bet ב ב ב ב Bet

Gimel ג ג ג ג Gimel

Dalet ד ד ד ד Daled

He	ה	ה	ה	𐤁	Heh	
Vav (Unicode)[16] / Waw				ו	ו	Vav
Zayin	ז	ז	ז	ז	Zayin	
Chet	ח	ח	ח	ח	Khet	
Tet	ט	ט	ט	ט	Tet	
Yod	י	י	י	י	Yud	
Kaf Non-final	כ	כ	כ		ך	Khof
Final	ך	ך	ך			
Lamed	ל	ל	ל		ל	Lamed
Mem Non-final	מ	מ	מ		ם	Mem
Final	ם	ם	ם			
Nun Non-final	נ	נ	נ		ן	Nun
Final	ן	ן	ן			
Samekh	ס	ס	ס		ס	Samekh
Ayin	ע	ע	ע		ע	Ayin
Pe Non-final	פ	פ	פ		ף	Pey
Final	ף	ף	ף			
Tsadi Non-final	צ	צ	צ		ץ	Tzadi ,
Final	ץ	ץ	ץ			
Qof	ק	ק	ק		ק	Quf
Resh	ר	ר	ר		ר	Resh
Shin	ש	ש	ש		ש	Shin

Tav ת ת ת

† Tof

Yiddish symbols

Main article: Yiddish alphabet

Symbol Explanation

װ ן ן ן **The Yiddish ligature: these forms are intended for Yiddish. (They are not used in Hebrew, aside from in loan words[d].) Visually, they can be recreated using a sequence of letters, ן ן ן, except when a diacritic is inserted underneath: it does not appear in the middle.**

ֿ **The rafe (רפה) diacritic is no longer regularly used in Hebrew. In Masoretic Texts and some other older texts, lenited consonants and sometimes matres lectionis are indicated by a small line on top of the letter. Its use has been largely discontinued in modern printed texts. It is still used to mark fricative consonants in the YIVO orthography of Yiddish.**

Numeric values of letters

Main article: Hebrew numerals

Following the adoption of Greek Hellenistic alphabetic numeration practice, Hebrew letters started being used to denote numbers in the late 2nd century BCE,[33] and performed this arithmetic function for about a thousand years. Nowadays alphanumeric notation is used only in specific contexts, e.g. denoting dates in the Hebrew calendar, denoting grades of school in Israel, other listings (e.g. שלב א', שלב ב' - "phase a, phase b"), commonly in Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) in a practice known as gematria, and often in religious contexts.[citation needed]

The lower clock on the Jewish Town Hall building in Prague, with Hebrew numerals in counterclockwise order.

letter numeric value		letter numeric value		letter numeric value	
א	1	י	10	ק	100
ב	2	כ	20	ר	200
ג	3	ל	30	ש	300
ד	4	מ	40	ת	400
ה	5	נ	50		
ו	6	ס	60		
ז	7	ע	70		
ח	8	פ	80		
ט	9	צ	90		

The numbers 500, 600, 700, 800 and 900 are commonly represented by the juxtapositions ת"ק, ת"ר, ת"ש, ת"ת, and תת"ק respectively. Adding a geresh (') to a letter multiplies its value by one thousand, for example, the year 5778 is portrayed as ה'תשע"ח, where ה' represents 5000, and תשע"ח represents 778. [citation needed]

Transliterations and transcriptions

Main articles: Romanization of Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Hebrew orthography, Yiddish, and Yiddish orthography

The following table lists transliterations and transcriptions of Hebrew letters used in Modern Hebrew.

Clarifications:

For some letters, the Academy of the Hebrew Language offers a precise

transliteration that differs from the regular standard it has set. When omitted, no such precise alternative exists and the regular standard applies.

The IPA phonemic transcription is specified whenever it uses a different symbol from the one used for the regular standard Israeli transliteration.

The IPA phonetic transcription is specified whenever it differs from IPA phonemic transcription.

Note: SBL's transliteration system, recommended in its Handbook of Style, [34] differs slightly from the 2006 precise transliteration system of the Academy of the Hebrew Language; for ⟨צ⟩ SBL uses ⟨ṣ⟩ (≠AHL ⟨z⟩), and for כּפֿגֿד with no dagesh, SBL uses the same symbols as for with dagesh (i.e. ⟨b⟩, ⟨g⟩, ⟨d⟩, ⟨k⟩, ⟨f⟩, ⟨t⟩).

Click "show" to view extended table including examples.

Hebrew letter	Standard
---------------	----------

Israeli	
---------	--

transliteration	
-----------------	--

– regular[35]	standard
---------------	----------

Israeli	
---------	--

transliteration	
-----------------	--

– precise[35]	IPA phonemic
---------------	--------------

transcription	IPA phonetic
---------------	--------------

transcription	
---------------	--

א	
---	--

consonantal, in	
-----------------	--

initial word	
--------------	--

positions	
-----------	--

none[A1] [ʔ]

ʌ

consonantal, in
non-initial word
positions

ʔ /ʔ/

ʌ

silent

none[A2]

ɸ b

ɸ v

ʌ g g

ʌ ġ

ʌ ġ[B1][30] /d͡ʒ/

ɸ d d

ɸ ḍ

ɸ

consonantal

h

ɸ

silent

none[A3]

l

consonantal

v w

ɪ u

ɨ o [ɔ] or [ɔ̣]

ʈ z

ʈ ž[B2][30] /ʒ/

ɲ h[C1] ɰ /x/ or /χ/ [χ]

dialectal

[h]

ʊ t ɖ

ɨ

consonantal

y /j/

ɨ

part of hirik male

(/i/ vowel)

ɨ

ɨ

part of tsere male

(/e/ vowel or

/ei/ diphthong)

e é /e/ or /ej/ [ɛ] or [ɛj]/

ɣ ,ɔ[29] k

ך,כ kh[C2] k̥ /x/ or /χ/ [χ]

ל l

ם,מ m

ן,נ n

ס s

ע

in initial or final

word positions

none[A4] ' **only in initial**

word position

[ʔ]

dialectal

/ʕ/

ע

in medial

word positions

' ' /ʔ/

dialectal

/ʕ/

פ[D] p

ף,פ f

ץ,צ ts z̥ /t͡s/

׳, ׳צ č[B3][30] /tʃ/

ק k q

ר r [ʀ] or [ʁ]

dialectal

[r] or [ʀ]

ש sh š /ʃ/

ס s ś

ת t t

ת t̥

Notes

A1^ 2^ 3^ 4^ In transliterations of modern Israeli Hebrew, initial and final ׀ (in regular transliteration), silent or initial ׀, and silent ׀ are not transliterated. To the eye of readers orientating themselves on Latin (or similar) alphabets, these letters might seem to be transliterated as vowel letters; however, these are in fact transliterations of the vowel diacritics – niqqud (or are representations of the spoken vowels). E.g., in ׀׀ ("if", [ʔim]), ׀׀ ("mother", [ʔem]) and ׀׀ ("nut", [ʔom]), the letter ׀ always represents the same consonant: [ʔ] (glottal stop), whereas the vowels /i/, /e/ and /o/ respectively represent the spoken vowel, whether it is orthographically denoted by diacritics or not. Since the Academy of the Hebrew Language ascertains that ׀ in initial position is not transliterated, the symbol for the glottal stop ׳ is omitted from the transliteration, and only the subsequent vowels are transliterated (whether or not their corresponding vowel diacritics appeared in the text being transliterated), resulting in "im", "em" and "om", respectively.

B1^ 2^ 3^ The diacritic geresh (׳) is used with some other letters as well (׳ד, ׳ח, ׳ט, ׳ע, ׳ר, ׳ת), but only to transliterate from other languages to Hebrew – never to spell Hebrew words; therefore they were not included in this table

(correctly translating a Hebrew text with these letters would require using the spelling in the language from which the transliteration to Hebrew was originally made). The non-standard ⟨ױ⟩ and ⟨ױ⟩ [e1] are sometimes used to represent /w/, which like /d͡ʒ/, /ʒ/ and /tʃ/ appears in Hebrew slang and loanwords.

C1^ 2^ The sound /χ/ (as ⟨ch⟩ in lo**ch**) is often transcribed ⟨ch⟩, inconsistently with the guidelines specified by the Academy of the Hebrew Language: חם /χam/ → "cham"; סכך /sχaχ/ → "schach".

D^ Although the Bible does include a single occurrence of a final pe with a dagesh (Book of Proverbs 30, 6: וְנִכְזְבֶּתָּ עַל-דִּבְרֵי: פִּן-יוֹכִים בָּךְ וְנִכְזְבֶּתָּ.), in modern Hebrew /p/ is always represented by pe in its regular, not final, form פ, even when in word-final position, which occurs with loanwords (e.g. שופ /ʃop/ "shop"), foreign names (e.g. פִּילִיפ /'filip/ "Philip") and some slang (e.g. חרפ /χa'rap/ "slept deeply").

Religious use

The signet ring of God is “Emess” (Truth), which contains the first, middle, and last of the Hebrew Alphabet; for God is within everything, surrounds everything, and nothing is outside of Him

—Maggid of Mezeritch

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet have played varied roles in Jewish religious literature over the centuries, primarily in mystical texts. Some sources[which?] in classical rabbinical literature seem to acknowledge the historical provenance of the currently used Hebrew alphabet and deal with them as a mundane subject (the Jerusalem Talmud, for example, records that "the Israelites took for themselves square calligraphy", and that the letters "came with the Israelites from Ashur [Assyria]");[36] others[which?] attribute mystical significance to the letters, connecting them with the

process of creation or the redemption. In mystical conceptions, the alphabet is considered eternal, pre-existent to the Earth, and the letters themselves are seen as having holiness and power, sometimes to such an extent that several stories from the Talmud illustrate the idea that they cannot be destroyed.[37]

The idea of the letters' creative power finds its greatest vehicle in the Sefer Yezirah, or Book of Creation, a mystical text of uncertain origin which describes a story of creation highly divergent from that in the Book of Genesis, largely through exposition on the powers of the letters of the alphabet: the letters are connected with the planets of universe, the astrology, with all parts of human-body and their "cause-effect reactions", the Sefirot and the ways of spiritual and material life; so Bereshit Rabbah, [38] the Midrash of Genesis, teaches that God did the world with his wisdom, that is the Torah with the letters of Hebrew. In Kabbalah all letters had the symbolic value that could be studied with transcendent exegesis, i.e. the "sod" of Pardes;[39] the created things (mineral, vegetal, animal and human levels of this world) have hebrew names which conceal their essential nature,[40] like the first man Adam who was knowing all names of all animals.[41] The supposed creative powers of the letters are also referenced in the Talmud and Zohar.[42][43]

The four-pronged Shin

Another book, the 13th-century Kabbalistic text Sefer HaTemunah, holds that a single letter of unknown pronunciation, held by some to be the four-pronged shin on one side of the teffilin box, is missing from the current alphabet. The world's flaws, the book teaches, are related to the absence of this letter, the eventual revelation of which will repair the universe.[44] Another example of messianic significance attached to the letters is the teaching of Rabbi Eliezer that the five letters of the alphabet with distinct final forms hold the "secret of redemption".[44]

In addition, the letters occasionally feature in aggadic portions of non-mystical rabbinic literature. In such aggada the letters are often given anthropomorphic qualities and depicted as speaking to God. Commonly their shapes are used in parables to illustrate points of ethics or theology. An example from the Babylonian Talmud (a parable intended to discourage speculation about the universe before creation); there is a discussion about this in “Kabbalah-texts”: this Creation was created at first time only with Genesis, not before.[45] So great Rabbanim explain that God has to create the universe in a moment that we don’t know why... before or after. God has not time, that is a category of material world, so we cannot explain what is the reason of Creation not but for Glory of God. In any case God creates “Homer Hayiuli” before this Creation as part of all things, that is the Hyle:

Why does the story of creation begin with bet?... In the same manner that the letter bet is closed on all sides and only open in front, similarly you are not permitted to inquire into what is before or what was behind, but only from the actual time of Creation.

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Hagigah, 77c

Extensive instructions about the proper methods of forming the letters are found in Mishnat Soferim, within Mishna Berura of Yisrael Meir Kagan.

Mathematical use

icon

This section does not cite any sources. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. (March 2025) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

In set theory,

§

0

$\aleph_0$, pronounced aleph-naught, aleph-zero, or aleph-null, is used to mark the cardinal number of an infinite countable set, such as

$\mathbb{Z}$

$\mathbb{Z}$, the set of all integers. More generally, the

$\aleph_\alpha$

$\aleph_\alpha$

$\aleph_\alpha$ aleph number notation marks the ordered sequence of all distinct infinite cardinal numbers.

Less frequently used, the

$\beth_\alpha$

$\beth_\alpha$

$\beth_\alpha$ beth number notation is used for the iterated power sets of

$\aleph_0$

$\beth_0$

$\aleph_0$. The second element

$\beth_1$

$\beth_1$

$\beth_1$ is the cardinality of the continuum. Very occasionally, a gimel function is used in cardinal notation.

Unicode and HTML

Main articles: Unicode and HTML for the Hebrew alphabet and Hebrew keyboard

An example of a Hebrew keyboard

The Unicode Hebrew block extends from U+0590 to U+05FF and from U+FB1D to U+FB4F. It includes letters, ligatures, combining diacritical marks (Niqqud and cantillation marks) and punctuation.[16] The Numeric Character References is included for HTML. These can be used in many markup languages, and they are often used in Wiki to create the Hebrew glyphs compatible with the majority of web browsers.

Standard Hebrew keyboards have a 101-key layout. Like the standard QWERTY layout, the Hebrew layout was derived from the order of letters on Hebrew typewriters.

See also

Hebrew braille

Hebrew diacritics

Cursive Hebrew

Hebrew punctuation

Hebrew spelling

Help:Hebrew

Inverted nun

Koren Type

Ktiv hasar niqqud ("spelling lacking niqqud")

Significance of numbers of Judaism

Sefer Yetzirah

Notes

a ^ "Alef-bet" is commonly written in Israeli Hebrew without the maqaf (מקף, "[Hebrew] hyphen"), אלפבית עברי, as opposed to with the hyphen, אלף־בית עברי.

b ^ The letters of the Arabic and Mandaic alphabets generally have four forms each, according to their position within the word (initial, medial, final, or isolate). (There are exceptions in both alphabets: in the Arabic, six of the 28 letters have only two forms each; in the Mandaic, three of the 22 have only a single form.)

c ^ In forms of Hebrew older than Modern Hebrew, בִּי״ת, כ״ף, and פ״א can only be read b, k and p, respectively, at the beginning of a word, while they will have the sole value of v, kh and f in a sofit (final) position; there are few exceptions.[29] (In medial positions, both pronunciations are possible.)

In Modern Hebrew the restriction is much less absolute, e.g. פִּיזִיקָאִי /fizi'kaj/ and never /pizi'kaj/ (= "physicist"), סְנוֹב /snob/ and never /snov/ (= "snob"). A dagesh may be inserted to unambiguously denote the plosive (b/k/p) variant: בּ = /b/, כּ = /k/, פּ = /p/; similarly (though today very rare in Hebrew, common only in Yiddish) a rafé placed above the letter unambiguously denotes the fricative (v/kh/f) variant: בֿ = /v/, כֿ = /χ/ and פֿ = /f/.

In Modern Hebrew orthography, the sound [p] at the end of a word is denoted by the regular form פּ, as opposed to the final form ף, which always denotes [f] (see table of transliterations and transcriptions, comment[D]).

d ^ A pair of separate vavs, ץ, sometimes occurs in Ktiv male: this is different from the Yiddish ligature ץ.

e1 ^ e2^ e3^ e4^ e5^ The Academy of the Hebrew Language states that both [v] and [w] should be indistinguishably represented in Hebrew using the letter vav.[35] Where this guideline is followed Hebrew readers must rely on context and former knowledge to pronounce foreign words and loanwords containing the [w] sound.

Where the vav is doubled this is not to denote [w]. A double vav is used in ktiv male to denote the phoneme /v/ at a medial position in a word (where a single vav would denote one of the phonemes /u/ or /o/).

References

"Hebrew alphabet." Encyclopedia Britannica. "Square Hebrew became established in the 2nd and 1st centuries bce and developed into the modern Hebrew alphabet over the next 1,500 years."

Abu Elhija, Dua'a (23 January 2014). "A new writing system? Developing orthographies for writing Arabic dialects in electronic media". Writing Systems Research. 6 (2). Informa UK Limited: 190–214. doi:10.1080/17586801.2013.868334. ISSN 1758-6801. S2CID 219568845.

Gaash, Amir. "Colloquial Arabic written in Hebrew characters on Israeli websites by Druzes (and other non-Jews)." Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam 43 (2016): 15.

Shachmon, Ori, and Merav Mack. "Speaking Arabic, Writing Hebrew. Linguistic Transitions in Christian Arab Communities in Israel". Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Des Morgenlandes, vol. 106, 2016, pp. 223–239. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/26449346. Accessed 15 July 2021.

Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 21b–22a); Jerusalem Talmud (Megillah 10a). Cf. Mishnah (Megillah 1:8): "The Books [of Scripture] differ from phylacteries and Mezuzahs only in that the Books may be written in any language, while phylacteries and Mezuzahs may be written in the Assyrian writing only." See: The Mishnah (ed. Herbert Danby), Oxford University Press: London 1977, p. 202.

Naveh, Joseph (1987), "Proto-Canaanite, Archaic Greek, and the Script of the Aramaic Text on the Tell Fakhariyah Statue", in Miller; et al. (eds.), Ancient Israelite Religion.

Smith, Mark S. (2002). The Early History of God: Yahweh and the other deities in ancient Israel. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. p. 20. ISBN 978-0-8028-3972-5.

The Calendar Tablet from Gezer, Adam L Bean, Emmanuel School of Religion Archived March 2, 2011, at the Wayback Machine

"Is it "Tenable"?", Hershel Shanks, Biblical Archaeology Review Archived December 25, 2010, at the Wayback Machine

Spelling in the Hebrew Bible: Dahood memorial lecture, By Francis I. Andersen, A. Dean Forbes, p56

Pardee, Dennis. "A Brief Case for the Language of the 'Gezer Calendar' as Phoenician". Linguistic Studies in Phoenician, ed. Robert D. Holmstedt and Aaron Schade. Winona Lake: 43.

Chris A. Rollston (2010). Writing and Literacy in the World of Ancient Israel: Epigraphic Evidence from the Iron Age. Society of Biblical Lit. pp. 30–. ISBN 978-1-58983-107-0.

Saénz-Badillos 1993, p. 16.

Saénz-Badillos 1993, p. 61–62.

Saénz-Badillos 1993.

"Hebrew" (character code chart). The Unicode Standard. Unicode, Inc.

Unicode names of Hebrew characters at fileformat.info.

Tappy, Ron E., et al. "An Abecedary of the Mid-Tenth Century B.C.E. from the Judaean Shephelah." Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, no. 344, 2006, pp. 5–46. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25066976>. Accessed 17 May 2024.

A. Dotan. "The Alphabet Inscription of 'Izbet Şarṭah / כתובת הא"ב מעזבת / צרטה." Eretz-Israel: Archaeological, Historical and Geographical Studies /

ארץ-ישראל: מחקרים בדיעת הארץ ועתיקותיה, vol. 16 (טז), 1982, pp. 62–69. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23619530>. Accessed 17 May 2024.

Renz, Johannes; Röllig, Wolfgang (2016). *Handbuch der althebräischen Epigraphik* (in German). Darmstadt: WBG (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft). p. 62. ISBN 978-3-534-26789-7.

Berlin 2004, p. 4.

Goldingay 2022, p. 75.

First 2017.

First 2014.

Pitre & Bergsma 2018.

Kaplan, Aryeh. *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*. pp. 8, 22.

"The Hebrew Alphabet (Aleph-Bet)". www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Retrieved 4 October 2020.

Rendsburg, Gary A. (1997). "Ancient Hebrew Phonology" (PDF). In Kaye, Alan S. (ed.). *Phonologies of Asia and Africa*. pp. 70, 73.

"ך" is rare but exists, e.g. last word in Deuteronomy 7 1 (דברים פרק ז' פסוק א') – see תנ"ך מנוקד, דברים פרק ז' – "מִמְּךָ" – There is a single occurrence of "ך", see this comment[D].

Transliteration guidelines preceding 2006-update Archived 2011-11-16 at the Wayback Machine, p. 3 Academy of the Hebrew Language

Laufer, Asher (2008). *Chapters in Phonetics and Phonetic Transcription*. Jerusalem: Magnes. pp. 207–211. ISBN 978-965-493-401-5.

"Hebrew lessons for Christians".

Sirat, Colette (1976), *Ecriture et civilisations*, Paris: Editions du CNRS.

"Resources for New Testament Exegesis – Transliteration Standards of The SBL Handbook of Style".

"Transliteration guidelines" (PDF). Academy of the Hebrew Language.

November 2006. Archived from the original (PDF) on 3 July 2014.

Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin 21b

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesach 87b, Avodah Zarah 18a.

“BEREŠIT RABBA” UTET

“Mistica ebraica“ Einaudi (Alfabeto di Rabbi Akiva)

“The Hebrew Letters: Introduction” (www.inner.org - GAL EINAI INSTITUTE)

Genesis 2.18-20 “Genesi 2,7-22” (www.laparola.net)

Babylonian Talmud, Berachot 55c

Zohar 1:3; 2:152

The Book of Letters. Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock. 1990

Michael Laitman. “Zohar. La luce della Kabbalah” Milano (Italy), Urra-Apogeo 2011 ISBN 978-88-503-3000-3

Bibliography

Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, §5 ff.

Berlin, Adele (2004). Lamentations: A Commentary. Westminster John Knox Press. ISBN 9780664229740.

First, Mitchell (June 2014). "Using the Pe–Ayin Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms". *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*. 38 (4): 471–485. doi:10.1177/0309089214536490. ISSN 0309-0892. S2CID 170926400.

First, Mitchell (2017). Pe before Ayin in Biblical Pre-Exilic Acrostics.

Goldingay, John (2022). The Book of Lamentations. Eerdmans Publishing Company. ISBN 9780802825421.

Hoffman, Joel M. 2004. In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language. New York: New York University Press.

Pitre, Brant J.; Bergsma, John S. (2018). A Catholic Introduction to the Bible: The Old Testament. Ignatius Press. p. 280. ISBN 978-1-58617-722-5.

Saénz-Badillos, Angel (1993). A History of the Hebrew Language. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Steinberg, David. History of the Hebrew Language.

External links

Wikimedia Commons has media related to Hebrew letters.

Wikiquote has quotations related to Hebrew alphabet.

General

How to draw letters

Official Unicode standards document for Hebrew

Unicode collation charts – including Hebrew letters, sorted by shape

Keyboards

LiteType.com – Virtual & Interactive Hebrew Keyboard

Mikledet.com – For typing Hebrew with an English keyboard (Hebrew keyboard|Hebrew layout)

Prize Find: Oldest Hebrew Inscription Archived 2012-02-29 at the Wayback Machine Biblical Archaeology Review

vte

Hebrew language

vte

Types of writing systems

vte

The Northwest Semitic abjad

,

b

g

d

h

w

z

ḥ

ṭ

y

k

l

m

n

s

‘

p

ş

q

r

š

t

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 20 30 40
50 60 70 80 90 100 200 300 400

History InscriptionsPhoenicianPaleo-HebrewHebrewAramaicSyriac

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

**Categories: Hebrew alphabet1st-millennium BC
introductionsAlphabetsAssyrian (Ashuri) scriptLanguage and
mysticismRight-to-left writing systemsHebrew languageAbjad writing
systems**

This page was last edited on 25 November 2025, at 12:06 (UTC).

**Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the
Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of
the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.**

**Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of
ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view**

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Raphael Patai

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Raphael Patai

רפאל פטאי

Born Ervin György Patai

22 November 1910

Budapest, Austria-Hungary

Died 20 July 1996 (aged 85)

Tucson, Arizona, United States

Occupations

EthnographerHistorianAnthropologist

Known for

Cultural development of ancient HebrewsJewish history and cultureMiddle Eastern anthropology

Spouse Naomi Tolkowsky

Relatives Saul Patai (brother)

Awards

Bialik Prize for Jewish thought (1936) National Jewish Book Award (1976)

Raphael Patai (Hebrew: רפאל פטאי; November 22, 1910 – July 20, 1996),[1] born Ervin György Patai, was a Hungarian-Jewish ethnographer, historian, and anthropologist.

Family background

Patai was born in Budapest, Austria-Hungary in 1910 to Edith Patai, née Ehrenfeld, and József Patai [hu]. Patai's mother was born in Nagyvárád to German-speaking, Jewish parents who expressed their commitment to Magyar Hungarian nationalism by sending their daughter to Hungarian-language schools.[2] Both parents spoke Hungarian and German fluently and educated their children to be perfectly fluent in both languages.[2] His father was a prominent literary figure, author of numerous Zionist and other writings, including a biography of Theodor Herzl. József was founder and editor of the Jewish political and cultural journal Múlt és jövő, (Past and Future) from 1911 to 1944, a journal that was revived in 1988 by János Köbányai in Budapest. József Patai also wrote an early History of Hungarian Jews and founded a Zionist organization in Hungary that procured support for the settlement of Jews in the British Mandate of Palestine.

Education

Raphael Patai studied at rabbinical seminaries in and at the University of Budapest and the University of Breslau, from which he received a doctorate in Semitic languages and Oriental history. He moved to Palestine in 1933, where his parents joined him in 1939, after he received the first doctorate awarded by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in 1936. He returned briefly to Budapest, where he completed his ordination at the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary.

Career

During the late 1930s and early 1940s Patai taught at the Hebrew University and served as the secretary of the Haifa Technion. He founded the Palestine Institute of Folklore and Ethnology in 1944, serving as its director of research for four years. He also served as scientific director of a Jewish folklore studies program for the Beit Ha'Am public cultural program in Jerusalem.[3]

In 1947 Patai went to New York with a fellowship from the Viking Fund for Anthropological Research (later renamed the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research); he also studied the Jews of Mexico. Patai settled in the United States, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1952. He held visiting professorships at a number of the country's most prestigious colleges, including Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, New York University, Princeton, and Ohio State. He held full professorships of anthropology at Dropsie College from 1948 to 1957 and Fairleigh Dickinson University. In 1952 he was asked by the United Nations to direct a research project on Syria, Lebanon and Jordan for the Human Relations Area Files.

Patai's work was wide-ranging but focused primarily on the cultural development of the ancient Hebrews and Israelites, on Jewish history and culture, and on the anthropology of the Middle East generally. He was the author of hundreds of scholarly articles and several dozen books, including three autobiographical volumes. In 1985 he was a contributor to an exhibit at the Museum of New Mexico.[4]

Awards

In 1936, Patai was the co-recipient (jointly with Moshe Zvi Segal) of the Bialik Prize for Jewish thought.[5]

In 1976, Patai was awarded the National Jewish Book Award in the Jewish History category for The Myth of the Jewish Race.[6]

Personal life

Patai married Naomi Tolkowsky, whose family had moved to what was then Palestine in the early twentieth century; they had two daughters, Jennifer (born 1942) and Daphne (born 1943). He died in 1996 in Tucson, Arizona, at the age of 85. Longtime Hebrew University of Jerusalem organic chemistry professor Saul Patai[7] (1918-1998) was his brother.

Selected bibliography

Own writings

Arab Folktales from Palestine and Israel. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1998. ISBN 9780814327104.

The Children of Noah: Jewish seafaring in ancient times. Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1998.

Jadā'id al-Islām: The Jewish "new Muslims" of Meshhed. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1997.

The Jewish Mind. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1996 [1973].

The Jews of Hungary: History, culture, psychology. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1996.

The Jewish Alchemists: A history and source book. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1994. ISBN 0691006423.

Thinkers and teachers of modern Judaism. New York, N.Y.: Paragon House. 1994. (with Emanuel S. Goldsmith)

The Hebrew Goddess (3rd enl. ed.). Detroit, Mich.: Wayne State University Press. 1990.

The Myth of the Jewish Race (Rev. ed.). Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1989. (with Jennifer Patai)

Gates to the Old City: A book of Jewish legends. Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson. 1988.

Apprentice in Budapest: Memories of a world that is no more. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press. 1988. ISBN 9780874802870.

Nahum Goldmann: His missions to the Gentiles. University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press. 1987. ISBN 9780817302948.

The Seed of Abraham: Jews and Arabs in contact and conflict (1st paperback ed.). Salt Lake and New York: Scribner and UUP. 1987 [1986].

The Kingdom of Jordan. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press. 1984.

The Arab Mind (Rev. ed.). New York: Scribner with introduction by Norvell de Atkine, Hatherleigh Press. 2002 [1973].

On Jewish folklore. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. 1983.

Gates to the Old City: A book of Jewish legends. New York and Detroit: Avon and Wayne State University Press. 1981 [1980].

The Messiah texts. New York and Detroit: Avon and Wayne State University Press. 1979.

Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria: An annotated bibliography. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press. 1973.

Tents of Jacob: The Diaspora, Yesterday and Today. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall. 1971. ISBN 9780139034763.

Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel. New York: Herzl Press. 1971.

Essays in Zionist history and thought. New York: Herzl Press.

The Hebrew goddess. New York: KTAV Publishing House. 1968. Reprint with an introduction by Merlin Stone

Golden River to Golden Road: Society, culture, and change in the Middle East (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1967.

Women in the modern world. New York: Free Press. 1967.

Sex and the Family in the Bible and the Middle East. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday. 1959.

The Kingdom of Jordan. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1958.

Israel Between East and West - A Study in Human Relations. Jewish Publication Society. 1953. ISBN 9780598687029.

Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth and Ritual. New York: Nelson. 1947.

Co-authorship

Patai, Raphael; Goldsmith, Emanuel S. (1995). Events and Movements in Modern Judaism. New York: Paragon House.

Patai, József; Patai, Raphael (1995). Souls and Secrets: Hasidic stories. Northvale, N.J.: J. Aronson.

Brauer, Erich; Patai, Raphael (1993). The Jews of Kurdistan. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Goldziher, Ignác; Patai, Raphael (1987). Ignaz Goldziher and his Oriental diary: A translation and psychological portrait. Detroit: Wayne State University Press. ISBN 9780814318423.

Graves, Robert; Patai, Raphael (1983). Hebrew myths: The book of Genesis. New York: Greenwich House.

Patai, Raphael; Rosow, Eugene; Kleiman, Vivian (1981) [1980]. The vanished worlds of Jewry. London and New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Patai, Raphael; Patai, Jennifer (1975). The Myth of the Jewish race. New York: Scribner. ISBN 9780684139067.

Patai, Raphael; Utley, Francis Lee; Noy, Dov (1973). Studies in Biblical and Jewish folklore. New York: Haskell House Publishers.

Autobiography

Patai, Raphael (2000). Journeyman in Jerusalem: Memories and Letters 1933-1947. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Secondary sources

Graves, Robert; Patai, Raphael (1964). Hebrew myths: The Book of Genesis (1st ed.). Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday.

Sanua, Victor D. (1983). Fields of Offerings: Studies in honor of Raphael Patai. Rutherford N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.

See also

Copper Green

List of Bialik Prize recipients

References

Dan Ben-Amos (1997). "Obituary: Raphael Patai (1910-1996)". The Journal of American Folklore. 110 (437 (Summer, 1997)): 314–316.

Marsha Rozenblit, Reconstructiong National Identity, Oxford, 2001, pp.31-32

Patai, Raphael (2000). Journeyman in Jerusalem: Memories and Letters, 1933-1947. Lexington Books. p. 436. ISBN 0739102095.

"At the door of the Tent of Meeting by Raphael Patai." in Zackheim, Michele. and Museum of Fine Arts. Museum of New Mexico. (1985). The Tent of Meeting : catalogue & guide. Santa Fe, NM : The Tent of Meeting.

"List of Bialik Prize recipients 1933-2004 (in Hebrew), Tel Aviv Municipality website" (PDF). Archived from the original (PDF) on 2007-12-17.

"Past Winners". Jewish Book Council. Retrieved 2020-01-23.

"Wiley".

External links

The Raphael Patai Papers at the New York Public Library

Raphael Patai Prize

Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology Archived 2011-09-28 at the Wayback Machine (Wayne State University Press)

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

International

ISNIVIAFGNDFASTWorldCat

National

United StatesFranceBnF dataJapanCzech RepublicSpainNetherlandsNorwayLatviaCroatiaGreeceSwedenPolandVaticanIsraelCataloniaBelgium

Academics

CiNii

People

TroveDeutsche BiographieDDB

Other

IdRefOpen Library23SNACYale LUX

Categories: 1910 births1996 deathsJewish historians20th-century Hungarian historiansHungarian anthropologistsAmerican ZionistsJewish orientalistsHungarian orientalistsHungarian ZionistsAmerican orientalistsAcademic staff of the Hebrew University of JerusalemFairleigh Dickinson University facultyHebrew University of Jerusalem alumniUniversity of Breslau alumniEötvös Loránd University alumniHungarian JewsHungarian emigrants to IsraelJews from Mandatory PalestineIsraeli emigrants to the United StatesAmerican people of Hungarian-Jewish descentWriters from Budapest20th-century American historians20th-century American male writersJewish scholars of Islam20th-century American anthropologistsAmerican male non-fiction writersEthnographers of Palestine (region)Bialik Prize recipients

This page was last edited on 16 October 2025, at 13:15 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

A. E. Waite

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Arthur Edward Waite

Waite in 1911

Born 2 October 1857

Brooklyn, New York, United States

Died 19 May 1942 (aged 84)

London, England

Resting place Bishopsbourne Village, in the county of Kent, England

Known for Rider–Waite Tarot

Spouses

Ada Lakeman

(m. 1888; died 1924)

Mary Broadbent Schofield

(m. 1933)

Children 1 daughter

Arthur Edward Waite (2 October 1857 – 19 May 1942) was a British poet and scholarly mystic who wrote extensively on the occult and Western esotericism. He was the co-creator of the Rider–Waite Tarot (also called the Rider–Waite–Smith or Waite–Smith deck). As his biographer R. A. Gilbert described him, "Waite's name has survived because he was the first to attempt a systematic study of the history of Western occultism—viewed as a spiritual tradition rather than as aspects of protoscience or as the pathology of religion."[1]

He was a Freemason, as well as being a member of the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

He spent most of his life in or near London, connected to various publishing houses and editing a magazine, The Unknown World.

Early life and education

Arthur Edward Waite was born on 2 October 1857 in Brooklyn, New York City, United States, to unmarried parents.[2] His father, Captain Charles F. Waite, died at sea when Arthur was very young, and his widowed mother, Emma Lovell, returned to her home country of England, where he was then raised.[2] They were well enough off to educate Waite at a small private school in North London.

When he was 13, he was educated for two terms at St. Charles' College.[3] When he left school to become a clerk he wrote verse in his spare time. In 1863 Waite's mother converted to Catholicism and Arthur was raised a Catholic.[4] The death of his sister Frederika Waite in 1874 soon attracted him into psychical research. At 21, he began to read regularly in the Library of the British Museum, studying many branches of esotericism. In 1881 Waite discovered the writings of Éliphas Lévi.

Career

Part of a series on the

Hermetic Order of

the Golden Dawn

Leading figures

**Allan Bennett Florence Farr Samuel MacGregor-Mathers Henry B. Pullen
Burry A. E. Waite William Wynn Westcott William Robert Woodman**

Teachings

Texts

Organizations

Related topics

vte

Golden Dawn

Waite joined the Outer Order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in January 1891 after being introduced by Edmund William Berridge.[5] In 1893 he withdrew from the Golden Dawn, but rejoined the Outer Order in 1896. In 1899 he entered the Second order of the Golden Dawn. He became a Freemason in 1901,[6][2] and entered the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia (SRIA) in 1902.

In 1903 Waite founded the Independent and Rectified Order R. R. et A. C. This Order was disbanded in 1914. The Golden Dawn was torn by internal feuding until Waite's departure in 1914; in July 1915 he formed the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross.[7] By that time there existed some half-dozen offshoots from the original Golden Dawn, and as a whole it never recovered.[8]

Freemason

Waite was interested in the higher grades of Freemasonry and saw initiation into Craft Masonry as a way to gain access to these rites. After joining the SRIA and the Knights Templar, Waite travelled to Switzerland in 1903 to receive the Régime Ecossais Rectifié or the Rectified Scottish Rite and its grade of Chevalier Bienfaisant de la Cité Sainte (C.B.C.S.). Waite believed that the Rectified Scottish Rite, more than any other Masonic Rite, represented the "Secret Tradition" of mystical spiritual illumination.[2]

Waite photographed in London, 13 January 1921

Writer and scholar

Waite was a writer and many of his works were well received in the esoteric circles of his time, but his lack of academic training is visible in his

limitations as a historian and in his belittling of other authors.[2]

He wrote texts on subjects including divination, esotericism, freemasonry, ceremonial magic, Kabbalism and alchemy; he also translated and reissued several mystical works. He wrote about the Holy Grail, influenced by his friendship with Arthur Machen.[9][10] A number of his volumes remain in print, including *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (1911), *The Holy Kabbalah* (1929), *A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (1921), and his edited translation of Lévi's 1896 *Transcendental Magic, its Doctrine and Ritual* (1910), having been reprinted in recent years.

Waite also wrote two allegorical fantasy novels, *Prince Starbeam* (1889) and *The Quest of the Golden Stairs* (1893), and edited *Elfin Music*, an anthology of poetry based on English fairy folklore.[11]

Tarot deck

The High Priestess, left, and the illustrator Pamela Colman Smith, from the now-famous tarot deck.

Waite is best known for his involvement with the Rider–Waite Tarot, first published in 1910, with illustrations by his fellow Golden Dawn member Pamela Colman Smith. Waite authored the deck's companion volume, the *Key to the Tarot*, republished in expanded form in 1911 as the *Pictorial Key to the Tarot*, a guide to tarot-reading.[12] The Rider–Waite Tarot was notable for illustrating all 78 cards fully, at a time when only the 22 Major Arcana cards were typically illustrated, with the Sola Busca tarot, 1491, being a notable historical exception. Prior to the publication of this deck, many esoteric tarot readers used the Tarot of Marseilles playing card deck. The Rider-Waite deck has gone on to have a large influence on contemporary tarot card reading.

Personal life

In 1888 he married Ada Lakeman (also called "Lucasta"), and they had one daughter, Sybil. From 1900 to 1909 Waite earned a living as a manager for Horlicks, the manufacturer of malted milk.[2]

Lucasta died in 1924.[2] In 1933 Waite married Mary Broadbent Schofield. [13] Waite died on 19 May 1942 at age 84.

In popular culture

H. P. Lovecraft's short story "The Thing on the Doorstep" includes a character named Ephraim Waite. According to Robert M. Price, this character was based on Waite.[14]

Works

This section needs more complete citations for verification. Please help add missing citation information so that sources are clearly identifiable. (November 2022) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Waite, A. E. (1886a). *Israfel: Letters, Visions and Poems*. London: Allen.

Waite, A. E. (1886b). *The Mysteries of Magic: A Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Levi*. London: George Redway.

Waite, A. E. (1887). *The Real History of the Rosicrucians*. London.

Waite, A. E. (1888a). *Alchemists Through the Ages*.

Waite, A. E. (1888b). *Lives of Alchemystical Philosophers*. London: George Redway.

Waite, A. E. (1888c). *Songs and Poems of Fairyland: An Anthology of English*

Fairy Poetry. London.

Waite, A. E. (1891). The Occult Sciences: A Compendium of Transcendental Doctrine and Experiment. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1893). The Alchemical Writings of Edward Kelly. London.

Waite, A. E. (1896). Devil-Worship in France. London: George Redway.

Waite, A. E. (1898). The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts.

Waite, A. E. (1902). A Book of Mystery and Vision.

Waite, A. E. (1909). The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail.

Waite, A. E. (1910). Steps to the Crown.

Waite, A. E. (1911a). The Pictorial Key to the Tarot. London: William Ryder & Son, Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1911b). The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry. London: Rebman. Two volumes.

Waite, A. E. (1912). The Book of Destiny and The Art of Reading Therein. London: William Rider & Son Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1913). The Book of Ceremonial Magic. London.

Waite, A. E. (1913). The Secret Doctrine in Israel A Study of the Zohar and Its Connections. London: William Rider & Son Limited.

Waite, A. E. (1914). The collected poems of Arthur Edward Waite, in two volumes. London: William Rider & Son Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1916). The Unknown Philosopher The Life of Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and the Substance of His Transcendental Doctrine. London.

Waite, A. E. (1921). A New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry.

Waite, A. E. (1922). Saint-Martin: The French Mystic and the Story of Modern Martinism.

Waite, A. E. (1924). The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross: Being Records of the House of the Holy Spirit in its Inward and Outward History. London: William

Rider & Son Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1925). Emblematic Freemasonry and the Evolution of its Deeper Issues. London: William Rider & Son Limited.

Waite, A. E. (1926). The Secret Tradition in Alchemy: Its Development and Records. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Waite, A. E. (1929). The Holy Kabbalah.

Waite, A. E. (1933). The Holy Grail, Its Legends and Symbolism. Rider & Co, Ltd.

Waite, A. E. (1938). Shadows of Life and Thought: A Retrospective Review in the Form of Memoirs. London: Selwyn and Blount.

Translations

Jennis, Lucas (1893) [1625]. Musaeum Hermeticum [The Hermetic Museum]. Translated by A. E. Waite. London. Two volumes.

Anonymous (1894) [c. 900]. Turba Philosophorum [Assembly of the Philosophers]. Translated by A. E. Waite.

Petrus Bonus (1894) [c. 1330-1339]. Margarita Preciosa Novella [New Pearl of Great Price]. Translated by A. E. Waite. James Elliott and Co.

Papus (1958). The Tarot of the Bohemians. Translated by A. E. Waite.

Éliphas Lévi, The history of magic (1922)

References

Citations

Gilbert (1987), p. 361.

Gilbert (1986).

Gilbert (1986), fn. 4.

Caleb (2007), p. 316 n. 2.

King (1989), p. 52.

Anon (n.d.).

Prosser (2004).

Howe (1972), p. [page needed].

Waite (1938), p. [page needed].

Gilbert (1987), p. [page needed].

Stableford (2009), pp. 420–21.

Waite (1911a).

Graham (2018), Timeline.

Price (1995), p. vi.

Works cited

Anon (n.d.). "Arthur E. Waite". Freemasonry.bcy.ca. Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon. Retrieved 30 November 2022.

Caleb, Amanda Mordavsky, ed. (2007). (Re)creating Science in Nineteenth-century Britain. Cambridge Scholars Pub. ISBN 978-1847182203.

Gilbert, R. A. (1986). "The Masonic Career of A. E. Waite". *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. 99. Archived from the original on 5 September 2010. Retrieved 23 May 2010 – via MasterMason.com.

Gilbert, R. A. (1987). *A. E. Waite: Magician of Many Parts* (1st ed.). Wellingborough, Northamptonshire: Crucible. ISBN 185274023X.

Graham, Sasha (2018). *Llewellyn's Complete Book of the Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot: A Journey Through the History, Meaning, and Use of the World's Most Famous Deck*. Llewellyn Worldwide. ISBN 978-0738753195.

Howe, Ellic (1972). *The Magicians of the Golden Dawn*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

King, Francis X. (1989). *Modern Ritual Magic: The Rise of Western Occultism*. Prism. ISBN 978-1853270321.

Price, Robert M., ed. (1995). *The Azathoth Cycle: Tales of the Blind Idiot God*.

Oakland, California: Chaosium. ISBN 978-1-56882-040-8.

Prosser, Lee (6 April 2004). "Arthur Edward Waite". Ghostvillage.com. Retrieved 30 November 2022.

Stableford, Brian (2009). "Waite, A. E.". The A to Z of Fantasy Literature. Scarecrow Press. ISBN 978-0-8108-6829-8.

Further reading

Gilbert, R. A. (1987b). The One Deep Student, a life of Arthur Edward Waite. Wellingborough.

External links

Library resources about

A. E. Waite

Resources in your library

Resources in other libraries

By A. E. Waite

Online books

Resources in your library

Resources in other libraries

Media related to Arthur Edward Waite at Wikimedia Commons

Quotations related to A. E. Waite at Wikiquote

 Works by or about A. E. Waite at Wikisource

Short Biography

Works by Arthur Edward Waite at Project Gutenberg

Works by or about A. E. Waite at the Internet Archive

Works by A. E. Waite at LibriVox (public domain audiobooks)

Works by Arthur Edward Waite at sacred-texts.com (plain text and HTML)

Arthur Edward Waite at the Internet Speculative Fiction Database

Arthur Edward Waite at Library of Congress, with 97 library catalogue records

Fellowship of the Rosy Cross

vte

Occult tarot

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: 1857 births1942 deaths19th-century British short story writers19th-century British writers19th-century occultists20th-century British writers20th-century occultistsAmerican emigrants to EnglandConverts to Roman CatholicismEnglish fantasy writersEnglish occult writersFreemasons of the United Grand Lodge of EnglandHermetic Order of the Golden Dawn20th-century mysticsPeople from BrooklynPeople associated with tarotVictorian writersWriters from New York City

This page was last edited on 26 July 2025, at 01:50 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Tree of life (Kabbalah)

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A request that this article title be changed to Kabbalistic tree of life is under discussion. Please do not move this article until the discussion is closed.

A version of the Kabbalistic tree of life

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

The tree of life (Hebrew: עץ חַיִּים, romanized: ʿēṣ ḥayyim or no: אֵילָן, romanized: ʾilān, lit. 'tree') is a diagram used in Rabbinical Judaism in kabbalah and other mystical traditions derived from it.[1] It is usually referred to as the "kabbalistic tree of life" to distinguish it from the tree of life that appears alongside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Genesis creation narrative as well as the archetypal tree of life found in many cultures.[2]

Simo Parpola asserted that the concept of a tree of life with different spheres encompassing aspects of reality traces its origins back to the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the ninth century BCE.[2] The Assyrians assigned moral values and specific numbers to Mesopotamian deities similar to those used in Kabbalah and claims that the state tied these to sacred tree images as a model of the king parallel to the idea of Adam Kadmon.[2] However, J. H. Chajes states that the ilan should be regarded as primarily indebted to the Porphyrian tree and maps of the celestial spheres rather than to any speculative ancient sources, Assyrian or otherwise.[3]

Kabbalah's beginnings date to the Middle Ages, originating in the Bahir[4] and the Zohar.[5] Although the earliest extant Hebrew kabbalistic manuscripts dating to the late 13th century contain diagrams, including one labelled "Tree of Wisdom," the now-iconic tree of life emerged during the fourteenth century.[6]

The iconic representation first appeared in print on the cover of the Latin translation of Gates of Light in the year 1516.[7] Scholars have traced the origin of the art in the Porta Lucis cover to Johann Reuchlin.[8]

Description

The tree of life usually consists of 10 or 11 nodes symbolizing different archetypes and 22 paths connecting the nodes. The nodes are often arranged into three columns to represent that they belong to a common category.[9]

In kabbalah, the nodes are called sefirot.[10] They are usually represented as circles and the paths (Hebrew: צִנּוֹרוֹת, romanized: ṣinnorot) are usually represented as lines.[11] The nodes usually represent encompassing aspects of existence, God, or the human psyche.[12] The paths usually represent the relationship between the concepts ascribed to the spheres or a symbolic description of the requirements to go from one sphere to another.[12] The columns are usually symbolized as pillars.[13] These usually represent different kinds of moral values, electric charges, or types of ceremonial magic.[7]

The sefirot are the ten spheres on the Tree of Life. Each sefirah (singular of sefirot) represents a different aspect of the Divine, as well as aspects of human consciousness and existence. These are, from top to bottom:[14]

Keter (crown)

Hokhmah (wisdom)

Binah (intelligence)

Hesed (mercy)

Gevurah (judgement)

Tiferet (beauty)

Netsah (lasting endurance)

Hod (majesty)

Yesod (foundation of the world)

Malkuth (kingdom)

An eleventh sefirah, Da'at, appears in some diagrams of the tree halfway between Keter (node 1) and Tiferet (node 6).[15]

The diagram is also used in Christian Kabbalah, Hermetic Qabalah, and Theosophy.[16] The nodes are also associated with deities, angels, celestial bodies, moral values, single colors or combinations of them, and specific numbers.[7]

History

Paolo Riccio's son, Jerome/Hieronimus, actively exchanged letters and shared his father's work with Reuchlin before publication.[17] Thus, in the year 1516, Reuchlin's diagram came to appear on the cover of the Paolo Riccio's Latin translation of Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla's Gates of Light. The diagram only had 17 paths and, at the time, the concepts of 10 spheres and 22 letters were still distinct in the literature.[18] In 1573, a version sketched by Franciscus Zillettus appeared in Cesare Evoli, De divinis attributis.[19]

This version introduced several innovations that would reappear in later versions: all the spheres were of the same size, the lines became wide paths, the spheres were aligned into 3 distinct columns, Malkuth was connected to three spheres, and astrological symbols for the known celestial bodies were used in conjunction with the Hebrew names to label the spheres. However, it also had only 17 paths, albeit distributed differently. Reuchlin's version was reprinted in Johann Pistorius' compilation of 1587. Finally, several versions from unknown artists introducing 21 and 22 paths appeared in the posthumous print editions of Moses Cordovero's Pardes Rimonim between

1592 and 1609.[citation needed] However, the diagrams with 22 paths lacked consistency with each other and none of them had the 22 letters.[20][better source needed] Between 1652 and 1654, Athanasius Kircher published his version of the tree in *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*. According to 20th-century occult writer Aleister Crowley, Kircher designed his diagram in a syncretic attempt to reconcile several distinct ideas. This heavily annotated version, self-termed Sefirotic System, introduced more innovations: abstract concepts, divine names, the 22 Hebrew letters for each path, and new astrological symbols.[21]

Between 1677 and 1684, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth published *Kabbala denudata*. The first volume concluded with an apparatus featuring five *ilanot*, or kabbalistic trees, representing various aspects of Lurianic cosmology. Four of these were based on *ilanot* that had been designed by Jewish kabbalists over the preceding half century; one (his figures 8–12) was designed by Knorr based on his reading of select passages of Naftali Hertz ben Yaakov Elchanan's 1648 *Emek ha-melekh*. [22]

Consequently, according to contemporary students of Western esotericism (rather than to scholars of Jewish Kabbalah), two versions are now widely circulated: one where Malkuth has 1 path, owing to Reuchlin's original; and another where Malkuth has three paths, owing to several later versions; both having 22 paths in total, corresponding each to a Hebrew letter, owing to Kircher's syncretism.[23] With the resurgence of occultism in the 19th century, many new versions appeared, but without major innovations.[24]

In Jewish mysticism

This section has multiple issues. Please help improve it or discuss these issues on the talk page. (Learn how and when to remove these messages)

This section relies largely or entirely on a single source. (February 2025)

This section focuses only on one specialised aspect of its subject. (February

2025)

A pattern inspired by the tree of life in a window in the Joods Historisch Museum in Amsterdam

The tree of life based on the depiction by Robert Fludd in the Deutsche Fotothek

According to a Chabad source, the tree of life is to be interpreted in the following way:[25]

The tree represents a series of divine emanations of God's creation itself ex nihilo, the nature of revealed divinity, the human soul, and the spiritual path of ascent by man. In this way, Kabbalists developed the symbol into a full model of reality, using the tree to depict a map of creation.[26]

The symbolic configuration is made of ten spiritual principles, but eleven can be shown, since Keter and Da'at are interchangeable.[26]

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is equivalent to the ten spheres seen from the last sphere of the diagram, Malkuth, and the original tree of life is equivalent to the ten spheres seen from the middle sphere of the diagram, Tiferet.[26]

Kabbalists believe the tree of life to be a diagrammatic representation of the process by which the universe came into being.[26]

On the tree of life, the beginning of the universe is placed in a space above the first sphere (named "Keter" or "crown" in English). It is not always

pictured in reproductions of the tree of life, but is referred to universally as Ohr Ein Sof (Hebrew: אֵין סוֹף אֹר, romanized: endless light).[26]

To Kabbalists, it symbolizes that point beyond which our comprehension of the origins of being cannot go. It is considered to be an infinite nothingness out of which the first "thing", usually understood by Kabbalists to be something approximating "energy", exploded to create a universe of multiple things.[26]

Kabbalists also do not envision time and space as preexisting and place them at the next three stages on the tree of life.[26]

First is "Keter", which is thought of as the product of the contraction of "Ein Sof" into a singularity of infinite energy or limitless light. In the Kabbalah, it is the primordial energy out of which all things are created.[26]

The next stage is "Chokmah" (or "wisdom" in English), which is considered to be the primordial masculine energy, a stage at which the infinitely hot and contracted singularity expanded forth into space and time. It is often thought of as pure dynamic energy of an infinite intensity forever propelled forth at a speed faster than light.[26]

Next comes "Binah" (or "understanding" in English), which is thought of as the primordial feminine energy, the supernal mother of the universe which receives the energy of "Chokmah", the father, cooling and nourishing it into the multitudinous forms present throughout the whole cosmos. It is also seen as the beginning of time itself.[26]

Numbers are very important to Kabbalists, and the Hebrew letters of the alphabet also have a numerical value. Each stage of the emanation of the

universe on the tree of life is numbered meaningfully from one ("Keter") to ten ("Malkuth"). Each number is thought to express the nature of its sphere.
[26]

The first three spheres, called the "supernal" spheres, are considered to be the primordial energies of the universe. The next stages of evolution on the tree of life are considered to exist beyond a space on the tree, called the "Abyss", between the "supernals" and the other spheres, because their levels of being are so distinct from each other that they appear to exist in two totally different realities. The "supernal" spheres exist on a plane of divine energy. This is why another correspondence for "Binah" is the idea of suffering because the "supernal" maternal energy gives birth to a world that is inherently excluded from that divine union.[26]

After "Binah", the universe begins building the materials it will need to fulfill its evolution and it creates new combinations of those materials until it is so dense that, by the stage of "Malkuth", the initial pure limitless energy has solidified into the physical universe.[26]

Since its energies are the basis of all creation, the tree of life can potentially be applied to any area of life, especially the inner world of man, from the subconscious all the way to what Kabbalists call the higher self.[26]

The tree of life speaks not only of the origins of the physical universe out of the unimaginable but also of humanity's place in it. Since man is invested with a mind, consciousness in the Kabbalah is thought of as the fruit of the physical world, through whom the original infinite energy can experience and express itself as a finite entity.[26]

After the energy of creation has condensed into matter, it is thought to reverse its course back up the tree until it is once again united with its true nature, Keter. Thus the Kabbalist seeks to know himself and the universe as

an expression of God and to make the journey of return using the stages charted by the spheres, until he has come to the realization he sought.[26]

See also

Atziluth

Boaz and Jachin

Flower of life

Qlippoth

References

Citations

Parpola (1993).

Parpola (1993); Welch & Parry (2011).

Chajes (2020); Chajes (2020b).

Scholem (1987), p. [page needed].

Ashlag (1977), p. 12.

Chajes (2020); Chajes (2022), pp. 6–36.

Low (2015), p. [page needed].

Van Heertum (2005): "The Inventory of Reuchlin's Hebrew works [...] lists Porta lucis under no. 35 [...] This is the first representation of the sefirotic tree in print".

Gray (1997), p. 115; Knight (2001), p. [page needed].

Shulman (1996).

Chwalkowski (2016), p. 44.

Drob (1998).

Gray (1997), p. 115.

Ashlag (1977), p. 125.

Regardie (1972); Welch & Parry (2011).

Welch & Parry (2011); Low (2015), p. [page needed].

Van Heertum (2005): "Reuchlin was sent Paulus Ricius' partial Latin translation of Sha'arei Orah by the latter's son, Hieronymus [...]".

Van Heertum (2005): "[T]he distinction between 'the knowledge of God by the path of the twenty-two letters' [...] and 'the knowledge of God by the path of the ten sefirot' [...] a distinction also referred to by [...] Reuchlin".

Van Heertum (2005), illus. 2: "Sefirotic tree in Cesare Evoli, *De divinis attributis*, Venice, Franciscus Zillettus, 1573".

Cordovero, Moses. "Kabbalistic Abridgments to the Pardes Rimonim: The Evolution of a Text". Penn Libraries. Archived from the original on 2019-10-19.

Crowley (1973), p. [page needed]: "The Jesuit Kircher gives [...] The order of the Planets is that of their apparent rate of motion. By writing them in their order round a heptagon [...]".

Chajes (2017); Chajes (2022).

Crowley (1973), p. [page needed]: "[I]n his *Oedipus Ægypticus*. It is this book (late 17th century) [that] contains the earliest known appearance of the version of the Tree of Life used by the [Golden Dawn] and Crowley, and in fact most modern Western occultists."

Crowley (1973).

Schneerson (1998).

Schneerson (1998), p. [page needed].

Works cited

Ashlag, Yehuda (1977). Berg, Philip S. (ed.). *An Entrance to the Tree of Life: A Key to the Portals of Jewish Mysticism*. Jerusalem: Research Centre of

Kabbalah. ISBN 978-0-943688-35-0.

Chajes, J. H. (2017). "Durchlässige Grenzen: Die Visualisierung Gottes zwischen jüdischer und christlicher Kabbala bei Knorr von Rosenroth und van Helmont". Morgen-Glantz: Zeitschrift der Christian Knorr von Rosenroth-Gesellschaft (in German). 27: 99–147.

Chajes, J. H. (2020). "The Kabbalistic Tree". In Kupfer, Marcia Ann; Cohen, Adam S.; Chajes, Jeffrey Howard (eds.). The Visualization of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Brepols. ISBN 978-2-503-58303-7.

Chajes, J. H. (April 2020b). "Spheres, Sefirot, and the Imaginal Astronomical Discourse of Classical Kabbalah". Harvard Theological Review. 113 (2): 230–262. doi:10.1017/S0017816020000061.

Chajes, J. H. (2022). The Kabbalistic Tree. Pennsylvania State University Press. ISBN 978-0-271-09345-1.

Chwalkowski, F. (2016). Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture: The Soul of Nature. Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN 978-1-4438-5728-4.

Crowley, Aleister (1973). 777 and other Qabalistic writings of Aleister Crowley. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser. ISBN 0-87728-222-6.

Drob, Sanford L. (1998). "The Lurianic Kabbalah: An Archtypal Interpretation". The New Kabbalah: Jung and the Kabbalah. Retrieved 2024-06-01.

Fortune, Dion (1957). The Mystical Qabalah. London: Ernest Benn. ISBN 978-0-510-41001-8.

Gray, William G. (1997). Qabalistic Concepts: Living the Tree. Red Wheel Weiser. ISBN 978-1-57863-000-4.

Knight, Gareth (2001). A Practical Guide to Qabalistic Symbolism. Weiser Books. ISBN 978-1-57863-247-3.

Low, Colin (2015). "The Tree of Life". The Hermetic Kabbalah. Digital Brilliance. ISBN 978-0993303401 – via Digital-brilliance.com.

Mottolese, M. (2007). Analogy in Midrash and Kabbalah: Interpretive Projections of the Sanctuary and Ritual. Israel: Cherub Press. ISBN 978-1-

933379-07-4.

Parpola, Simo (1993). "The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy". *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. 52 (3): 161–208. doi:10.1086/373622. JSTOR 545436. S2CID 162212276.

Regardie, Israel (1972). *The Tree of Life: A Study in Magic*. York Beach, Maine: Samuel Weiser, Inc. ISBN 978-0-87728-149-8.

Regardie, Israel (2000). *The Golden Dawn*. Llewellyn. ISBN 978-0-87542-663-1.

Schneerson, Shalom Dov Baer (1998). *Kuntres Etz Hachayim [The Tree of Life]*. Translated by Eliyahu Touger. Sichos in English. ISBN 978-1881400356 – via Chabad.org.

Scholem, Gershom (1987). *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society. ISBN 978-0-8276-0268-7.

Shulman, Yaacov Dovid (1996). *The Sefirot: Ten Emanations of Divine Power*. Jason Aronson. ISBN 978-1-56821-929-5.

Van Heertum, Cis (2005). *Philosophia Symbolica: Johann Reuchlin and the Kabbalah: Catalogue of an Exhibition in the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica Commemorating Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522)*. Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica.

Welch, John Woodland; Parry, Donald W. (2011). *The Tree of Life: From Eden to Eternity*. Deseret Book.

Further reading

Achad, Frater (1969). *Q.B.L. Or The Bride's Reception: Being A Qabalistic Treatise on the Nature and Use of the Tree of Life*. Red Wheel Weiser. ISBN 978-0-87728-004-0.

Bar-Lev, Yechiel (1994). *Song of the Soul: Introduction to Kabbalah*. Bar-Lev.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan (2006). *Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism: An Introductory Anthology*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications. ISBN 978-1-85168-454-0.

Freer, Ian (2013). *The Pagan Eden: The Assyrian Origins of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life*. Collective Ink. ISBN 978-1-78099-961-6.

Greer, John Michael (2007). Paths of Wisdom: A Guide to the Magical Cabala. Thoth Publications. ISBN 978-1-913660-07-9.

Halevi, Z'ev ben Shimon (2016). The Kabbalistic Tree of Life. Bet El Trust. ISBN 978-1-909171-41-1.

Macdonald, Michael-Albion (1986). The Secret of Secrets: The Unwritten Mysteries of Esoteric Qabalah. Heptangle Books. ISBN 978-0-935214-08-6.

Miller, Moshe (n.d.). "Emanations Interact: The sefirot are understood in the shape of the human form". Chabad.org. Kabbalah Online.

Mistele, William R. (2024). The Hermetic Tree of Life: Elemental Magic and Spiritual Initiation. Inner Traditions/Bear. ISBN 978-1-64411-745-3.

Parfitt, Will (1995). The New Living Qabalah: A Practical Guide to Understanding the Tree of Life. Element. ISBN 978-1-85230-682-3.

Rankine, David (2005). Climbing the Tree of Life: A Manual of Practical Magickal Qabalah. Avalonia. ISBN 978-1-905297-06-1.

Regardie, Israel (1999). Cicero, Chic; Cicero, Sandra Tabatha (eds.). A Garden of Pomegranates: Skrying on the Tree of Life. Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications. ISBN 978-1-56718-141-8.

Schochet, Jacob Immanuel (1998). Mystical Concepts in Chassidism: An Introduction to Kabbalistic Concepts and Doctrines (3rd ed.). Kehot. ISBN 0-8266-0412-9.

External links

Wikimedia Commons has media related to Tree of life (Kabbalah).

Wikiquote has quotations related to Tree of life (Kabbalah).

The Tree of Life in Kabbalah by Rodurago Cypheron

Ilanot: Maps of God — a searchable descriptive catalogue of kabbalistic diagrams in manuscripts and books from Medieval Age to the 20th century,

by J. H. Chajes

vte

Thelema

Categories: 9th-century BC introductionsTrees of lifeChristian KabbalahHermetic QabalahJewish symbolsKabbalistic words and phrasesMagic symbolsReligious diagramsThelemaNeo-Assyrian Empire

This page was last edited on 19 November 2025, at 23:01 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Sefer Yetzirah

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

Sefer Yetzirah (Hebrew: סֵפֶר יִצְרָה *Sēper Yəṣīrā*, **Book of Formation**, or **Book of Creation**) is a work of Jewish mysticism. Early commentaries, such as the *Kuzari*,^[1] treated it as a treatise on mathematical and linguistic theory, as opposed to one about Kabbalah. The word Yetzirah is more literally translated as "Formation", the word B'riah being used for "Creation".^[a] The book is traditionally ascribed to the patriarch Abraham, although others attribute its writing to Rabbi Akiva or Adam. Modern scholars have not reached consensus on the question of its origins. According to Saadia Gaon, the objective of the book's author was to convey in writing how the things of our universe came into existence.^[2] Conversely, Judah Halevi asserts that

the main objective of the book, with its various examples, is to give humans the means to understand the unity and omnipotence of God, which appear multiform on the one hand, and yet, are uniform.[3]

The famous opening words of the book are as follows:

By thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom Yah has engraved [all things], [who is] the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the living God, the Almighty God, He that is uplifted and exalted, He that Dwells forever, and whose Name is holy; having created His world by three [derivatives] of [the Hebrew root-word] sefar : namely, sefer (a book), sefor (a count) and sippur (a story), along with ten calibrations of empty space and twenty-two letters [of the Hebrew alphabet], [of which] three are principal [letters] (i.e. א מ ש), seven are double-sounding [consonants] (i.e. בג"ד כפר"ת) and twelve are ordinary [letters] (i.e. הו זח ט י ל נ ס ע צ ק).[4]

Origin

A cryptic story in the Babylonian Talmud states,

On the eve of every Shabbat, Rav Hanina and Rav Hoshaiah would sit and engage in study of Sefer Yetzirah, and create a delicious calf and eat it.[5]

According to modern historians, the origin of the text is unknown, and hotly debated. Some scholars believe it might have an early medieval origin,[b] while others cite earlier traditions appearing in the book.[6] Most contemporary scholars date the text's authorship to the Talmudic period.[7]

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, the essential elements of the book are characteristic of the 3rd or 4th century; for a work of this nature, composed

in the Geonic period, could have been cast only in the form of Jewish gnosis, which remained stationary after the 4th century, if indeed it had not already become extinct.[8] The historical origin of the Sefer Yetzirah was placed by Richard August Reitzenstein in the 2nd century BCE.[9] According to Christopher P. Benton, the Hebrew grammatical form places its origin closer to the period of the Mishnah,[10] around the 2nd century CE.

The division of the letters into the three classes of vowels, mutes, and sonants also appears in Hellenic texts.[8]

The date and origin of the book cannot be definitely determined as long as there is no critical text of it. The editio princeps (Mantua, 1562) contains two recensions, which were used in the main by the commentators of the book as early as the middle of the 10th century. The shorter version (Mantua I.) was annotated by Dunash ibn Tamim or by Jacob ben Nissim, while Saadia Gaon and Shabbethai Donnolo wrote commentaries on the longer recension (Mantua II.). The shorter version was also used by most of the later commentators, such as Judah ben Barzillai and Nachmanides, and it was, therefore, published in the ordinary editions. The longer recension, on the other hand, was little known, the form given in the editio princeps of the Sefer Yetzirah being probably a copy of the text found in Donnolo's commentary. In addition to these two principal recensions of the text, both versions contain a number of variant readings that have not yet been examined critically.[8]

As regards the relation of the two recensions, it may be said that the longer form contains entire paragraphs which are not found in the shorter, while the divergent arrangement of the material often modifies the meaning essentially. Although the longer recension doubtless contains additions and interpolations which did not form part of the original text, it has many valuable readings which seem older and better than the corresponding passages in the shorter version, so that a critical edition of the text must consider both recensions.[8]

Legendary origin

Mystics assert that the biblical patriarch Abraham used the same method to create the calf prepared for the three angels who foretold Sarah's pregnancy in the biblical account at Genesis 18:7.[11] All the miraculous creations attributed to other rabbis of the Talmudic era are ascribed by rabbinic commentators to the use of the same book.

Sefer Yetzirah's appendix (6:15) declares that Abraham was the recipient of the divine revelation of mystic lore; so that the rabbis of the classical rabbinic era[12] and philosophers such as Shabbethai Donnolo and Judah HaLevi[13] never doubted that Abraham was the author of the book.

In Pardes Rimonim, Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (Ramak) mentions a minority opinion that Rabbi Akiva authored it, and takes it to mean that Abraham wrote it and Akiva redacted it to its current form.[10] Jewish Lore attributes the Kabbalah to Adam, and holds that "[f]rom Adam it passed over to Noah, and then to Abraham, the friend of God." [14]

In a manuscript in the British Museum, the Sefer Yetzirah is called the Hilkhoh Yetzirah and declared to be esoteric lore not accessible to anyone but the truly pious.[15]

Manuscripts

Title Page of Sefer Yetzirah, Mantua, Italy, 1562

The Sefer Yetzirah exists in many manuscripts, generally falling in categories known as:[10]

The Short Version,

The Long Version,

The Saadia Version, and

The Gra Version

The long version contains entire paragraphs which are not found in the short version, while the divergent arrangement of the material often modifies the meaning essentially.[8] The short version comprises about 1,300 words and was annotated by Dunash ibn Tamim, and it formed the basis of the first printed Hebrew edition, published in Mantua in the year 1562, and most main versions printed thereafter. The long version is 2,500 words and is present with a commentary by Shabbethai Donnolo. It is frequently printed with this commentary as an appendix to editions of the short Version. In the 13th century, Abraham Abulafia noted the existence of both of these versions.

The Mantua 1562 edition was printed with the short version surrounded by commentaries attributed to Abraham ben David (outside of the page), Nachmanides (bottom of the page) and Moses Botarel (inside of the page; the printer notes that Botarel followed the first two rabbis and also collected all other commentaries that preceded him). An appendix following this contains a pair of commentaries printed side by side, one attributed to Eleazar of Worms) on the outside of the pages and the other to Saadia Gaon on the inside of the pages. At the end of the volume is found the long version. [16]

In the middle of the 16th century, the leader of the school of Safed kabbalists, Moses Cordovero, established a working text based on ten separate manuscripts. His student and successor Isaac Luria further redacted this to harmonize it with the Zohar, and then in the 18th century, the Vilna Gaon, known as "the Gra", further redacted it. This text is called the Gra or ARI-Gra version.

In the 10th century, Saadia Gaon wrote his commentary based on a manuscript which was a reorganized copy of the Longer Version, now called

the "Saadia Version". This was translated into French by Lambert and thence into English by Scott Thompson. This version and commentary was more philosophical in nature rather than mystical and had virtually no impact on subsequent kabbalists.[17]

Influence

The Sefer Yetzirah is devoted to speculations concerning God's creation of the world. The ascription of its authorship to the biblical patriarch Abraham shows the high esteem that it enjoyed for centuries. It may even be said that this work had a greater influence on the development of the Jewish mind than almost any other book after the completion of the Talmud.[8]

The Sefer Yetzirah is exceedingly difficult to understand on account of its obscure style. The difficulty is rendered still greater by the lack of a critical edition, the present text being much interpolated and altered.[8] Hence there is a wide divergence of opinion regarding the age, origin, contents, and value of the book.[8]

Jewish study

The history of the study of the Sefer Yetzirah is one of the most interesting in the records of Jewish literature. With the exception of the Bible, scarcely any other book has been the subject of so much annotation.[8]

An intimate relation exists between the Sefer Yetzirah and the later mystics; and although there is a marked difference between the later Kabbalah and the Sefer Yetzirah (for instance, the sefirot of the Kabbalists do not correspond to those of the Sefer Yetzirah), the system laid down in the latter is the first visible link in the development of Kabbalistic ideas. Instead of the immediate creation ex nihilo, both works postulate a series of emanations of mediums between God and the universe; and both consider God as the first cause only, and not as the immediate efficient cause of the world.[8]

A book of the same name was circulated among the Ashkenazi Hasidim between the 11th and 13th centuries, for whom it became a source of Practical Kabbalah. This book seems to be a mystic work on the six days of creation, and corresponded in part to the small midrash, Seder Rabbah deBereshit.[8]

In Thelema

Charles Stansfeld Jones, in his book called The Anatomy of The Body of God[18] has written interpretations of this book from the viewpoint of Thelema, a new religious movement founded by Aleister Crowley early in the 20th century.

Teachings

Structure

The Sefer Yetzirah describes how the universe was created by the "God of Israel" (a list of all of God's Hebrew names appears in the first sentence of the book) through "32 wondrous ways of wisdom":

Ten Numbers (sefirot, the origin for the sefirot of later Kabbalah)

The Twenty-Two Letters of the Hebrew alphabet—

Three mother letters (Aleph, Mem, Shin)

Seven doubles (Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Kaph, Pe, Resh, Taw)

Twelve simples or elementals (He, Waw, Zayin, Heth, Teth, Yodh, Lamedh, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Tsade, Qoph)

The book describes the method for using the ten sefirot and the 22 Hebrew letters to gain Divine Insight/Secret using Abraham's tongue. God's covenant with Abraham is described as being twofold.

The phonetic system

The philological is discussed first, since it is necessary for an elucidation of the philosophical speculations of the work. The twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet are classified both with reference to the position of the vocal organs in producing the sounds, and with regard to sonant intensity. In contrast to the Jewish grammarians, who assumed a special mode of articulation for each of the five groups of sounds, the Sefer Yetzirah says that no sound can be produced without the tongue, to which the other organs of speech merely lend assistance. Hence the formation of the letters is described as follows:

With the tip of the tongue and the throat

Between the lips and the tip of the tongue

In the middle of the tongue

By the tip of the tongue

By the tongue, which lies flat and stretched, and by the teeth (ii. 3)[8]

The letters are distinguished, moreover, by the intensity of the sound necessary to produce them, and are accordingly divided into:

Mutes, which are unaccompanied by sound, such as Mem

Sibilants, such as Shin, which is therefore called the "hissing shin"

Aspirates, such as Aleph, which holds a position between the mutes and sibilants, and is designated as the "airy Aleph, which holds the balance in the middle" (iv. 1; in some eds. ii. 1)

Besides these three letters, which are called "mothers," a distinction is also drawn between the seven "double" letters, which have two different sounds according to inflection, and the twelve "simple" letters, the remaining characters of the alphabet which represent only one sound each.[8]

Themes

Both the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (human) are viewed in this system as products of the combination and permutation of these mystic characters,[19] and such a use of the letters by the Jews for the formation of the Holy Name for thaumaturgical purposes is attested by magic papyri that quote an "Angelic Book of Moses", which was full of allusions to biblical names.[8]

The linguistic theories of the author of the Sefer Yetzirah are an integral component of its philosophy, its other parts being astrological and Gnostic cosmogony. The three letters Aleph, Mem, Shin, are not only the three "mothers" from which the other letters of the alphabet are formed, but they are also symbolic figures for the three primordial elements, the substances which underlie all existence.[8]

According to the Sefer Yetzirah, the first emanation from the spirit of God was the ruach (רוח rūah "spirit", "air") that produced water, which, in its turn, formed the genesis of fire. In the beginning, however, these three substances had only a potential existence, and came into actual being only by means of the three letters Aleph, Mem, Shin; and as these are the principal parts of speech, so those three substances are the elements from which the cosmos has been formed.[8]

The cosmos consists of three parts, the world, the year (or time), and man, which are combined in such a way that the three primordial elements are contained in each of the three categories. The water formed the earth; heaven was produced from the fire; and the ruach produced the air between heaven and earth. The three seasons of the year—winter, summer, and the rainy season—correspond to water, fire, and ruach in the same way as man consists of a head (corresponding to fire), torso (represented by ruach), and the other parts of the body (equivalent to water).[8]

The seven double letters produced the seven planets, the "seven days," and the seven apertures in man (two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and one mouth.) Again, as the seven double letters vary, being pronounced either hard or soft, so the seven visible planets are in continuous movement, approaching or receding from the earth. The "seven days," in like manner, were created by the seven double letters because they change in time according to their relation to the planets. The seven apertures in man connect him with the outer world as the seven visible planets join heaven and earth. Hence these organs are subject to the influence of the planets, the right eye being under Saturn, the left eye under Jupiter, and the like.[8]

The twelve "simple" letters were used to create the twelve signs of the zodiac, whose relation to the earth is always simple or stable; and to them belong the twelve months in time, and the twelve "leaders" in man. The latter are those organs which perform functions in the body independent of the outside world, being the hands, feet, kidneys, gall, intestines, stomach, liver, pancreas, and spleen; and they are, accordingly, subject to the twelve signs of the Zodiac.[8][6]

In its relation to the construction of the cosmos, matter consists of the three primordial elements; they are not chemically connected with one another, but modify one another only physically. Power (δύναμις) emanates from the seven and the twelve heavenly bodies, or, in other words, from the planets and the signs of the zodiac. The "dragon" rules over the world (matter and the heavenly bodies); the sphere rules time; and the heart rules over the human body. The author sums up this explanation in a single sentence: "The dragon is like to a king on his throne, the sphere like a king traveling in his country, and the heart like a king at war." [8]

Creation

To harmonize the Genesis creation narrative, which is a creatio ex nihilo[citation needed], with the doctrine of the primordial elements, the

Sefer Yetzirah assumes a double creation, one ideal and the other real.[8]

Their name is possibly derived from the fact that as numbers express only the relations of two objects to each other, so the ten sefirot are only abstractions and not realities. Again, as the numbers from two to ten are derived from the number one, so the ten Sefirot are derived from one "their end is fixed in their beginning, as the flame is bound to the coal" (i. 7). Hence the Sefirot must not be conceived as emanations in the ordinary sense of the word, but rather as modifications of the will of God, which first changes to air, then becomes water, and finally fire, the last being no further removed from God than the first. The Sefer Yetzirah shows how the sefirot are a creation of God and the will of God in its varied manifestations.[8]

Besides these abstract ten sefirot, which are conceived only ideally, the twenty-two letters of the alphabet produced the material world, for they are real, and are the formative powers of all existence and development. By means of these elements the actual creation of the world took place, and the ten sefirot, which before this had only an ideal existence, became realities. This is, then, a modified form of the Talmudic doctrine that God created heaven and earth by means of letters (Berakhot 58a). The explanation on this point is obscure since the relation of the twenty-two letters to the ten sefirot is not clearly defined.[8]

The first sentence of the book reads: "Thirty-two paths, marvels of wisdom, hath God engraved...", these paths being then explained as the ten sefirot and the twenty-two letters. While the sefirot are expressly designated as "abstracts", it is said of the letters: "Twenty-two letters: God drew them, hewed them, combined them, weighed them, interchanged them, and through them produced the whole creation and everything that is destined to come into being" (ii. 2).[8]

The letters are neither independent substances nor yet as mere forms. They seem to be the connecting-link between essence and form. They are

designated as the instruments by which the real world, which consists of essence and form, was produced from the sefirot, which are merely formless essences.[8]

Theories of contrast in nature

In addition to the doctrine of the Sefirot and the letters, the theory of contrasts in nature, or of the syzygies ("pairs"), as they are called by the Gnostics, occupies a prominent place in the Sefer Yetzilah. This doctrine is based on the assumption that the physical as well as the spiritual world consist of pairs mutually at war, but equalized by the unity, God. Thus in the three prototypes of creation the contrasting elements fire and water are equalized by air; corresponding to this are the three "Rulers" among the letters, the mute Mem contrasting with the hushing Shin, and both being equalized by Aleph.[8]

Seven pairs of contrasts are enumerated in the life of man:

Life and death

Peace and war

Wisdom and folly

Wealth and poverty

Beauty and ugliness

Fertility and sterility

Lordship and servitude (iv. 3).[8]

From these premises the Sefer Yetzilah draws the important conclusion that subjective "good and evil" have no real existence, for since everything in nature can exist only by means of its contrast, a thing may be called good or evil according to its influence over man by the natural course of the contrast.[8]

The book teaches that man is a free moral agent, and therefore a person is rewarded or punished for his or her actions. While the ideas of heaven and hell are left unmentioned in the book, it teaches that the virtuous man is rewarded by a favorable attitude of nature, while the wicked man finds it hostile to him.[8]

Gnostic elements

Sefer Yetzirah is similar to various Gnostic systems. As the Sefer Yetzirah divides the Hebrew alphabet into three groups, so the Gnostic Marcus divided the Greek letters into three classes, regarded by him as the symbolic emanations of the three powers which include the whole number of the upper elements.[8]

Both systems attach great importance to the power of the combinations and permutations of the letters in explaining the genesis and development of diversity from unity. The Clementine literature present another form of gnosis that agrees with the Sefer Yetzirah. As in the latter, God is not only the beginning but also the end of all things, so in the former He is the arche (Koine Greek: ἀρχή, Hebrew: ראשית) and telos (τέλος, תכלית) of all that exists; and the Clementine writings furthermore teach that the spirit of God is transformed into pneuma (πνεῦμα, רוח), and this into water, which becomes fire and rocks, thus agreeing with the Sefer Yetzirah, where the pneuma, air, water, and fire are the first four Sefirot.[8]

The remaining six Sefirot, or the limitations of space by the three dimensions in a twofold direction, are also found in the Clementina, where God is described as the boundary of the universe and the source of the six infinite dimensions.[8]

The "theli" (תלי teli, perhaps meaning "curled one" as a coiled serpent) which plays such a vital part in the astrology of the book, is probably an ancient

Semitic figure; at all events its name is an Akkadian loan-word.[8] The "dragon" is often understood as the starry constellation Draco and by extension it represents the cosmic axis (equivalent to the north/south pole) because this constellation coils around Polaris and thus around the celestial axis, as it intersects the northernmost part of the celestial sphere.

Factorial

In discussing the number of words that can be formed from the Hebrew alphabet,[20] Sefer Yetzirah includes one for the earliest known descriptions of the mathematical function factorial, enumerating its first seven values and emphasizing its rapid growth.[21]

Influence

In 2002, American mathematician Robert P. C. de Marraais named the pathions, or the 32-dimensional hypercomplex numbers, after the 32 paths of wisdom in the Sefer Yetzirah.[22]

Editions and translations

First edition

ספר יצירה (in Hebrew). Mantua. 1562. Retrieved 2024-07-01 – via National Library of Israel.

Other important editions

ספר יצירה (in Hebrew). Amsterdam. 1642.

ספר יצירה (in Hebrew). Grodno. 1806 – via Hebrewbooks.org. Includes five commentaries.

ספר יצירה (in Hebrew). Warsaw. 1884. Includes nine commentaries.

Goldschmidt, Lazarus, ed. (1894). Das Buch der Schöpfung (Sepher Jezirah). Kritisch redigierter Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar. Frankfort-on-the-

Main – via Hebrewbooks.org.

Translations

Latin

Postell, Guillaume (1552). Abraham Patriarchœ Liber Iezirah (in Latin). Paris: Guillaume Postell.

Pistor, Johann Ludwig (1587). "Liber de Creatione". Ars Cabalistica (in Latin). Basel: Conrad Waldkirch.

Rittangel, Johann Stephan (1642). Sefer Yetzirah (in Latin). Amsterdam: Menasseh ben Israel.

German

von Meyer, Johann Friedrich (1830). Das Buch Yezira (in German). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus.

English

Kalisch, Isidor (1877). Sepher Yezirah: A Book on Creation; or the Jewish Metaphysics of Remote Antiquity. New York: L. H. Frank & Co. – via Hebrewbooks.org.

Westcott, William Wynn (1887). Sepher Yezirah. London: Theosophical Publishing Society – via Sacred-texts.com.

Kaplan, Aryeh (1991). "The Sefer Yetzirah: Short Version". Psyche.com. Retrieved 2024-07-01.

French

Karppe, S. (1901). Etude sur les Origines et la Nature du Zohar (in French). Paris: Emile Bouillon. pp. 139–158.

See also

Jewish views on astrology

Primary texts of Kabbalah

Notes

In Hebrew, Yetzirah can mean either "creation" or "formation," but can also refer to the created or formed object itself. A work of art, for example, is called in Hebrew 'yetzira', as well as the action of creating it. Thus, the name Sefer Yetzirah could refer to the act of creating or forming the cosmos, or to the cosmos itself, or both. Since there is a specific Hebrew word for the creation of the cosmos (b'riah) it is more likely that the meaning refers to formation, or formed-object, or both.

Karr (2022): "The date of SY's [note Sefer Yetzirahs] composition remains a matter of some debate, though most scholars agree that it was written or compiled between the second and sixth centuries. However, Steven M. Wasserstrom has offered a strong case for the ninth century within an Islamic milieu. It was certainly extant by the tenth century, for it exerted a great influence on speculative and mystical thought from that time on."

References

Attribution

Public Domain This article incorporates text from this source, which is in the public domain: 1901 Jewish Encyclopedia

Citations

Halevi (n.d.), Fourth Essay.

Saadia Gaon (1972), p. 46.

Halevi (n.d.), part 4, section 25.

Saadia Gaon (1972), p. 35.

Sanhedrin 65b; see also Sanhedrin 67b.

Kaplan (1997), p. 219

Liebes, Yehudah. "Seven Doubled Letters BGD KFRT: On the doubled reish and on the background of Sefer Yetzirah". Archived from the original on 2006-10-10. Footnote 9 and associated text.

One or more of the preceding sentences incorporates text from a

publication now in the public domain: Singer, Isidore; et al., eds. (1901–1906). "YEẒIRAH, SEFER". The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. Retrieved 16 April 2013.

Reitzenstein, Richard August (1904). Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur (in German). p. 291.

Benton (2003–04).

Azulai, Abraham (1685). חסד לאברהם, מעין חמישי, נהר נא (in Hebrew). Amsterdam. Archived from the original on 9 February 2017. Retrieved 23 April 2013.

See Hai Gaon in the responsum cited in "Kerem Ḥemed", viii, 57.

Halevi (n.d.).

Ginsburg (1865), p. 84.

See Margoliouth, "Catalogue of the Hebrew and Samaritan Manuscripts of the British Museum," part II., p. 190; compare ib. p. 255, where it is mentioned as being used by Nachmanides for Kabbalistic purposes.

Mantua (1562).

Dobbs, Bryan Griffith. "Sefer Yetzirah". Archived from the original on 2022-10-04.

Jones (1925).

"Sefer Yetzirah: Language as Creation". Learnkabbalah.com. Archived from the original on 2013-12-09. Retrieved 2018-12-07.

Kaplan (1997), Chapter IV, Section 4.

Katz (1994).

de Marrais, Robert P. C. (2002). "Flying Higher Than a Box-Kite: Kite-Chain Middens, Sand Mandalas, and Zero-Divisor Patterns in the 2^n -ions Beyond the Sedenions". arXiv:math/0207003.

Works cited

Benton, Christopher P. (Winter 2003–04). "An Introduction to the Sefer Yetzirah" (PDF). *The Maqom Journal for Studies in Rabbinic Literature*. VII. Archived (PDF) from the original on 2006-11-10. Retrieved 2006-12-28.

Ginsburg, Christian D. (1865). *Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.

Halevi, Judah (n.d.). מאמר רביעי, סימן כה [Kitab al Khazari] (in Hebrew). Archived from the original on 15 December 2013. Retrieved 23 April 2013.

Jones, Charles Robert Stansfeld (1925). *The Anatomy of the Body of God: Being the Supreme Revelation of Cosmic Consciousness Explained and Depicted in Graphic Form*. Chicago: Collegium ad Spiritum Sanctum.

Kaplan, Aryeh (1997). *Sepher Yetzirah: The Book of Creation in Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Weiser Books. ISBN 978-0-87728-855-8.

Karr, Don (2022). "Notes on Editions of Sefer Yetzirah in English" (PDF). *Digital-brilliance.com*. Retrieved 2024-07-01.

Katz, Victor J. (June 1994). "Ethnomathematics in the classroom". *For the Learning of Mathematics*. 14 (2): 26–30. JSTOR 40248112.

Saadia Gaon (1972). Qafih, Yosef (ed.). *Sefer Yetzirah (Kitāb al-mabādī)*, with a Translation and Commentary by Rabbi Saadia Gaon (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Committee for the publication of Rabbi Saadia Gaon's books (in affiliation with the American Academy of Jewish Studies). OCLC 319752519.

Further reading

Bacher, Wilhelm (1895). *Die Anfänge der Hebräischen Grammatik* (in German). Leipzig: Gustav Fock. pp. 20–23.

Castelli, David (1880). *Il Commento di Sabbatai Donnolo al Libro della Creazione* (in Italian). Florence: Tipografia G. Civelli.

Donnolo, Sabbatai (1881). David Castelli (ed.). *Sefer Ḥakhmoni* (in Hebrew and Italian). Firenze (Florence): Le Monnier. OCLC 162802215.

Epstein, Jacob (1888–1889). "Pseudo-Saadia". *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (in German). 37.

Epstein, Jacob (1888–1889). "Studien zum Jezira-Buche". *Monatsschrift für*

Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums (in German). 37.

Epstein, Jacob (1894). "Recherches sur le Sefer Yeçira". *Revue des Études Juives* (in French). 28–29: 131–174, 48–84.

Epstein, Jacob (1895). "Further Studies on Sefer Yetzirah". *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*. 39: 46–48, 134–136.

Franck, Adolphe (1843). *La Kabbale: ou La philosophie religieuse des Hébreux* (in French). Paris: Durand. pp. 53–66, 102–118.

**Die Kabbala oder die Religionsphilosophie der Hebräer (in German).
Translated by Adolph Jellinek. Leipzig: Baumgärtner. 1844. pp. 57–65.**

Fürst, Julius (1863). *Bibliotheca Judaica: Bibliographisches Handbuch der gesamten jüdischen Literatur* (in German). Vol. 1. Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann. pp. 27–28.

Grätz, Heinrich (1846). *Gnosticismus und Judenthum* (in German). Breslau: J. Hainauer. pp. 102–132.

Hamburger, Johann (1891). *Real-Encyklopädie für Bibel und Talmud. Supplementband III* (in German). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus. pp. 98–102.

Jellinek, Adolph (1852). *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala, Erster Teil* (in German). Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus. pp. 3–16.

Rosenthal, Ludwig (1887). *Keneset Yisrael*. Vol. 2. pp. 29–68.

Steinschneider, Moritz (1852–1860). *Catalogus Librorum Hebraeorum in Bibliotheca Bodleiana* (in Latin). Berlin: A. Asher & Co. cols. 552-554.

Thompson, Scott J. "Sefer Yetzirah Bibliography". Walter Benjamin Research Syndicate. Archived from the original on 2000-08-31.

Zedner, Joseph (1867). *Catalogue of the Hebrew Books in the Library of the British Museum*. London: British Museum. p. 13.

External links

Hebrew Wikisource has original text related to this article:

Sefer yetzirah, original text, short version

Works related to Sefer Yetzirah at Wikisource

Sefer Yetzirah Gra Version 1 at Sefaria.org

Astrological Correspondences in the Sepher Yetsira

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: AbrahamAncient Hebrew textsAstrological textsKabbalah textsLanguage and mysticismSifrei Kodesh

This page was last edited on 11 November 2025, at 23:45 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Etz Chaim (book)

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For the Humash used in conservative Judaism, see Etz Hayim Humash.

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

Etz Chaim (Hebrew: עץ חיים, "Tree of Life") is a literary work that deals with the Kabbalah, written in 1573. It is a summary of the teachings of the Rabbi Isaac Luria, the Arizal (1534-1572), a rabbi and a kabbalist who led a study group on Kabbalah in the city of Safed, in indigenous Israel.[1]

Luria did not publish any works of his own. Etz Chaim was compiled by his student and disciple, Rabbi Chaim Vital, who wrote down the lessons taught by Luria to his study group on Kabbalah.[citation needed]

The book talks about the divine order and the existence of things, and deals with revelation and the perception of reality by human beings. The first fragment of the book makes reference to the tree of life, which gives the book its name: "You know, before the beginning of the Creation there was only the highest and fullest light. The description of the creation process starts from that point, especially." [This quote needs a citation]

The book marks the beginning of the school of thought known as the Lurianic Kabbalah.[2] Before Luria, Kabbalists revealed the development of reality from its origin to our world (from the understandable light). According to Rabbi Chaim Vital, Luria discovered a method to better understand this reality.

English translations

The Tree of Life: Chayyim Vital's Introduction to the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria - The Palace of Adam Kadmon (1999, Jason Aronson) Translated by Donald Wilder Menzi and Zwe Padeh ISBN 9780765760111

2nd Edition (2008, Arizal Publications) ISBN 9780979597107

This is a translation of the first volume of Etz Chaim.

The Tree of Life (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform) Translated by E. Colle and H. Colle

Volume One: The Palace of Adam Kadmon (2015) ISBN 9781512065855

Volume Two: The Palace of Points (2016) ISBN 9781535259224

Volume Three: The Palace of Crowns and The Palace of Abba and Imma (2017) ISBN 9781979572071

Volume Four: The Palace of Zeir Anpin - Part One (2020) ISBN 9798606851645

Etz Chayim: The Tree of Life (2016, David Smith) Translated by Baal Even

Tome 1 of 12 ISBN 9781988631035

Tome 2 of 12 ISBN 9781988631042

Tome 3 of 12 ISBN 9781988631059

Tome 4 of 12 ISBN 9781988631066

Tome 5 of 12 ISBN 9781988631073

Tome 6 of 12 ISBN 9781988631080

Tome 7 of 12 ISBN 9781988631097

Tome 8 of 12 ISBN 9781988631103

Tome 9 of 12 ISBN 9781988631110

Tome 10 of 12 ISBN 9781988631127

Tome 11 of 12 ISBN 9781988631134

Tome 12 of 12 ISBN 9781988631141

References

"Works of Rabbi Chaim Vital". www.chabad.org.

Karr, Don. "Which Lurianic Kabbalah?". Academia.edu.

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

Stub icon

This article about a Judaism-related book or text is a stub. You can help Wikipedia by expanding it.

Categories: [Kabbalah texts](#)[1573 books](#)[Trees of life](#)[Judaism book stubs](#)

This page was last edited on 23 November 2025, at 15:50 (UTC).

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use and Privacy Policy](#). [Wikipedia®](#) is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

[Wikimedia Foundation](#)

[Powered by MediaWiki](#)

[Wikipedia](#)[The Free Encyclopedia](#)

[Donate](#)

[Create account](#)

[Log in](#)

[Tikkunei Zohar](#)

[Article](#)

[Talk](#)

[Tools](#)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Look for Tikkunei Zohar on one of Wikipedia's sister projects:

Wiktionary (dictionary)

Wikibooks (textbooks)

Wikiquote (quotations)

Wikisource (library)

Wikiversity (learning resources)

Commons (media)

Wikivoyage (travel guide)

Wikinews (news source)

Wikidata (linked database)

Wikispecies (species directory)

Wikipedia does not have an article with this exact name. Please search for

Tikkunei Zohar in Wikipedia to check for alternative titles or spellings.

You need to log in or create an account and be autoconfirmed to create new articles. Alternatively, you can use the article wizard to submit a draft for review, or request a new article.

Search for "Tikkunei Zohar" in existing articles.

Look for pages within Wikipedia that link to this title.

Other reasons this message may be displayed:

If a page was recently created here, it may not be visible yet because of a delay in updating the database; wait a few minutes or try the purge function.

Titles on Wikipedia are case sensitive except for the first character; please check alternative capitalizations and consider adding a redirect here to the correct title.

If the page has been deleted, check the deletion log, and see Why was the page I created deleted?

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Zohar

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For other uses, see Zohar (disambiguation).

Zohar

Title page of the first printed edition of the Zohar, Mantua, 1558

Information

Religion **Judaism**

Author **Moses de León**

Language **Aramaic, Medieval Hebrew**

Period **High medieval**

Full text

Zohar at Hebrew Wikisource

Zohar at English Wikisource

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

The Zohar (Hebrew: זֹהָר‬, romanized: *Zōhar*, lit. 'Splendor' or 'Radiance'[a]) is a foundational work of Kabbalistic literature.[1] It is a group of books including commentary on the mystical aspects of the Torah and scriptural interpretations as well as material on mysticism, mythical cosmogony, and mystical psychology. The Zohar contains discussions of the nature of God, the origin and structure of the universe, the nature of souls, redemption, the relationship of ego[citation needed] to darkness and "true self" to "the light of God".

The Zohar was first publicized by Moses de León (c. 1240 – 1305 CE), who claimed it was a Tannaitic work recording the teachings of Simeon ben Yochai[b] (c. 100 CE). This claim is universally rejected by modern scholars, most of whom believe de León, also an infamous forger of Geonic material, wrote the book himself between 1280 and 1286. Some scholars argue that the Zohar is the work of multiple medieval authors and/or contains a small amount of genuinely antique novel material. Later additions to the Zohar, including *Tiqqune hazZohar* and *Ra'ya Meheimna*, were composed by a 14th century imitator.

Language

Zoharic Aramaic

According to Gershom Scholem and other modern scholars, Zoharic Aramaic is an artificial dialect largely based on a linguistic fusion of the Babylonian Talmud and Targum Onkelos, but confused by de León's simple and imperfect grammar, his limited vocabulary, and his reliance on loanwords, including from contemporaneous medieval languages.[2][3][4] The author further confused his text with occasional strings of Aramaic-seeming gibberish, in order to give the impression of obscure knowledge.[5]

Zoharic Hebrew

The original text of the Zohar, as cited by various early Kabbalists beginning around the 14th century (e.g. Isaac b. Samuel of Acre, David b. Judah the Pious, Israel Alnaqua, Alfonso de Zamora) was partly in Hebrew and partly in Aramaic.[c] By the time of the first edition (1558) the text was entirely in Aramaic,[6] with the exception of the Midrash haNe'elam, where Hebrew words and phrases are often employed as in the Babylonian Talmud. "The Hebrew of the Midrash haNe'elam is similar in its overall form to the language of the early midrashim, but its specific vocabulary, idioms, and stylistic characteristics bear the imprint of medieval Hebrew, and its midrashic manner is clearly that of a later imitation." [5]

Authorship

Initial view

Authorship of the Zohar was questioned from the outset, due to the claim that it was discovered by one person and referred to historical events of the post-Talmudic period while purporting to be from an earlier date.[7] Abraham Zacuto's 1504 work Sefer Yuhasin (first printed 1566) quotes from the Kabbalist Isaac ben Samuel of Acre's 13th century memoir Divre hayYamim (lost), which claims that the widow and daughter of de León revealed that he had written it himself and only ascribed the authorship to Simeon ben Yochai for personal profit:

And [Isaac] went to Spain, to investigate how it happened in his time that the Book of the Zohar was found, which Simeon ben Yochai and his son Elazar had made in the cave . . . and some say that [de Leon] forged it among his forgeries,[d] but [Isaac later] said that the Palestinian Aramaic[e] sections were genuinely written by Simeon b. Yochai[f] . . . And [Isaac] wrote:

Because I had seen that these words were wonderous, that they ran from a well high above which is beyond those uninitiated into the secrets of the divine, I chased after it and I asked the scholars . . . and some said it had fallen into the hand of the sage Moses de Leon, whom they call Moses of Guadalajara, and some said Simeon ben Yochai had never written this book, but that Moses had written these wonderous words and falsely ascribed them to Simeon ben Yochai and his son Elazar in order to sell them for huge sums of money. And I went to Spain, to the capital city of Valladolid, and presented myself to Moses, and was received favorably, and he swore to me by the Lord that the ancient book of Simeon ben Yochai was that day in his house in Ávila, and that he would show it to me when I visited him, and Moses parted from me to return home, but he sickened in Arévalo on the way, and he died there, and when I heard of this I was mortally pained, and I took to the road, and I came to Ávila, and I found a great old sage there named David de Pancorbo,[g] and he received me favorably, and I demanded he explain to me the secrets of the Book of the Zohar, about which men were disputing, and about which Moses himself had sworn beyond doubt until his death, but about which I did not know upon whom to rely or whom to trust, and he told me, "Know in truth that it is clear to me beyond doubt that it never came to the hand of this Moses, and that there is no Book of the Zohar except that of which Moses himself wrote every word. Know that this Moses was a great spendthrift; one day his house was filled with treasures that the wealthy mystics had given him in exchange for excerpts, and the next his wife and children were starving naked in the street. So when we heard that he had died in Arévalo, I went to the house of the richest man in the city, Joseph de Ávila,[h] and said to him, 'Now the time has come for you to earn the priceless Zohar if you will do what I advise', and he followed my advice, and he sent his wife to the house of Moses' widow, and she said to her, 'Know that my wish is to marry your daughter to my son, and I ask nothing from you except the Book of the Zohar from which your husband excerpted for many people,' and Moses' widow swore to Joseph's wife, 'By the Lord, my husband never had such a book except in his mind, and everything he wrote

came from his own intellect. When I saw him writing, I asked him why he claimed to be excerpting from a book I knew he did not have, and he told me that it was because, while for his own words they would not give a penny, for the divinely inspired work of Simeon ben Yochai they will pay in blood.' And Moses' daughter said exactly the same." Can you ask for better proof than this?

Isaac goes on to say that he obtained mixed evidence of Zohar's authenticity from other Spanish Kabbalists, but the fragment ends abruptly, mid-sentence, without any conclusion. Though Isaac is willing to quote it in his *Otzar haChayyim*[8] and his *Meirat Einayim*,[9] he does so rarely.[10] Isaac's testimony was censored from the second edition (1580)[11] and remained absent from all editions thereafter until its restoration nearly 300 years later in the 1857 edition.[12][13] In 1243 a different Jew had reportedly found a different ancient mystical book in a cave near Toledo, which may have been de Leon's inspiration.[14][15]

Within fifty years of its appearance in Spain it was quoted by Kabbalists, including the Italian mystical writer Menahem Recanati and Todros ben Joseph Abulafia. However, Joseph ben Waqar harshly attacked the Zohar, [16] which he considered inauthentic,[17] and some Jewish communities, such as the Dor Daim from Yemen, Andalusian (Western Sefardic or Spanish and Portuguese Jews), and some Italian communities, never accepted it as authentic.[7] Other early Kabbalists, such as David b. Judah the Pious (fl. c. 1300), Abraham b. Isaac of Granada, (fl. c. 1300), and David b. Amram of Aden (fl. c. 1350), so readily imitate its pseudepigraphy by ascribing contemporaries' statements to Zoharic sages that it is obvious they understood its nature.[5][18] The manuscripts of the Zohar are from the 14th-16th centuries.[19]

Late Middle Ages

By the 15th century, the Zohar's authority in the Iberian Jewish community was such that Joseph ibn Shem-Tov drew arguments from it in his attacks against Maimonides, and even representatives of non-mystical Jewish thought began to assert its sacredness and invoke its authority in the decision of some ritual questions. In Jacobs' and Broyde's view, they were

attracted by its glorification of man, its doctrine of immortality, and its ethical principles, which they saw as more in keeping with the spirit of Talmudic Judaism than are those taught by the philosophers, and which was held in contrast to the view of Maimonides and his followers, who regarded man as a fragment of the universe whose immortality is dependent upon the degree of development of his active intellect. The Zohar instead declared Man to be the lord of creation, whose immortality is solely dependent upon his morality.[7]

Conversely, Elia del Medigo (c. 1458 – c. 1493), in his *Behinat ha-Dat*, endeavored to show that the Zohar could not be attributed to Simeon ben Yochai, by a number of arguments. He claims that if it were his work, the Zohar would have been mentioned by the Talmud, as has been the case with other works of the Talmudic period; he claims that had ben Yochai known by divine revelation the hidden meaning of the precepts, his decisions on Jewish law from the Talmudic period would have been adopted by the Talmud, that it would not contain the names of rabbis who lived at a later period than that of ben Yochai; he claims that if the Kabbalah were a revealed doctrine, there would have been no divergence of opinion among the Kabbalists concerning the mystic interpretation of the precepts.[7][20]

Believers in the authenticity of the Zohar countered that the lack of references to the work in Jewish literature was because ben Yochai did not commit his teachings to writing but transmitted them orally to his disciples over generations until finally the doctrines were embodied in the Zohar. They found it unsurprising that ben Yochai should have foretold future happenings or made references to historical events of the post-Talmudic period.[7]

By the late 16th century, the Zohar was present in one-tenth of all private Jewish libraries in Mantua.[21] The authenticity of the Zohar was accepted by such 16th century Jewish luminaries as Joseph Karo (d. 1575), and Solomon Luria (d. 1574), who wrote nonetheless that Jewish law does not follow the Zohar when it is contradicted by the Babylonian Talmud.[22]

Luria writes that the Zohar cannot even override a minhag.[23] Moses Isserles (d. 1572) writes that he "heard" that the author of the Zohar is ben Yochai.[24] Elijah Levita (d. 1559) did not believe in its antiquity,[25] nor did Joseph Scaliger (d. 1609)[26] or Louis Cappel (d. 1658) or Johannes Drusius (d. 1616).[27] David ibn abi Zimra (d. 1573) held that one can follow the Zohar only when it does not conflict with any other source[28] and records that "You asked me about scribes modifying torah scrolls to accord with the Zohar ... and I was shocked, for how can they consider the Zohar better than the Talmud Bavli, which has come down to us?[i] ... So I went myself to the house of the scribe and I found three scrolls which he had edited, and I fixed them, and I restored the Torah to its proper glory." [29]

Enlightenment Period

Debate continued over the generations; del Medigo's arguments were echoed by Leon of Modena (d. 1648) in his *Ari Nohem*, by Jean Morin (d. 1659), and by Jacob Emden (d. 1776).

Emden—who may have been familiar with Modena through Morin's arguments[7]—devoted a book to the criticism of the Zohar, called *Mitpachas Sefarim* (מטפחת ספרים), in an effort against the remaining adherents of the Sabbatean movement (in which Sabbatai Zevi, a Jewish apostate, cited Messianic prophecies from the Zohar as proof of his legitimacy). Emden argued that the book on which Zevi based his doctrines was a forgery, arguing that the Zohar:

misquotes passages of Scripture

misunderstands the Talmud

contains some ritual observances that were ordained by later rabbinical authorities

mentions the Crusades against Muslims (who did not exist in the 2nd

century)

uses the expression *esnoga*, a Portuguese term for the synagogue

gives a mystical explanation of the Hebrew vowel points, which were not introduced until long after the Talmudic period.[7]

Saul Berlin (d. 1794) argued that the presence of an introduction in the Zohar, unknown to the Talmudic literary genre, itself indicates a medieval date.[30]

In the Ashkenazi community of Eastern Europe, religious authorities including Elijah of Vilna (d. 1797) and Shneur Zalman of Liadi (d. 1812) believed in the authenticity of the Zohar, while Ezekiel Landau (d. 1793), in his *sefer Derushei HaTzlach* (דרושי הצל"ח),[31] argued that the Zohar is to be considered unreliable as it was made public many hundreds of years after Ben Yochai's death and lacks an unbroken tradition of authenticity, among other reasons.[32]

Isaac Satanow accepted Emden's arguments and referred to the Zohar as a forgery,[33] also offering new evidence.[15] By 1813 Samuel David Luzzatto had concluded that "these books [the Zohar and the *Tiqqunei Zohar*] are utter forgeries," in part because they repeatedly discuss the Hebrew cantillation marks, which were not invented until the 9th century.[15] In 1817 Luzzatto published these arguments, and in 1825 he penned a fuller treatise, giving many reasons why the Zohar could not be ancient. However, he did not publish this until 1852, when he felt it justified by the rise of Hasidism.[34][15] Moses Landau (d. 1852), Ezekiel's grandson, published the same conclusion in 1822.[35] Isaac Haver (d. 1852) admits the vast majority of content comes from the 13th century but argues that there was a genuine core.[36] Solomon Judah Loeb Rapoport (d. 1867) spoke against the Zohar's antiquity.[37] Eliakim ha-Milzahgi (d. 1854) accepted Emden's arguments.[38]

The influence of the Zohar in Yemen contributed to the formation of the Dor

Deah movement, led by Yiḥyah Qafih in the later part of the 19th century. Among its objects was the opposition of the influence of the Zohar, as presented in Qafih's Milhamoth Hashem (Wars of the Lord)[39] and Da'at Elohim.

Shlomo Zalman Geiger (d. 1878), in his book Divrei Kehilot on the liturgical practice of Frankfurt am Main, records that "We do not say brikh shmei in Frankfurt, because its source is in the Zohar, and the sages of Frankfurt refused to accept Qabbalah." [40]

Modern religious views

In 1892, Adolf Neubauer called on the Orthodox rabbinate to reject the Zohar as a forgery and to remove Zoharic prayers from the liturgy.[6] However, Yechiel Michel Epstein (d. 1908) and Yisrael Meir Kagan (d. 1933) both believed in the authenticity of the Zohar, as did Menachem Mendel Kasher (d. 1983), Aryeh Kaplan (d. 1983), [8] David Luria (d. 1855), [41] and Chaim Kanievsky (d. 2022). [42] The foremost halachik authority of the 20th Century, Moshe Feinstein, stated unequivocally that the Zohar and Tikkunim are words of the Tannaim. [43] Aryeh Carmell (d. 2006) did not, and Eliyahu Dessler (d. 1953) accepted the possibility that it was composed in the 13th century. Gedaliah Nadel (d. 2004) was unsure if the Zohar were genuine but was sure that it is acceptable to believe that it is not. [44] Ovadia Yosef (d. 2013) held that Orthodox Jews should accept the Zohar's antiquity in practice based on medieval precedent, but agreed that rejecting it is rational and religiously valid. [42] Joseph Hertz (d. 1946) called the claim of ben Yochai's authorship "untenable", citing Gershom Scholem's evidence. [45] Samuel Belkin (d. 1976) argued that the Mystical Midrash section, specifically, predated de León. [46] Joseph B. Soloveitchik (d. 1993) apparently dismissed the Zohar's antiquity. [42] Moses Gaster (d. 1939) wrote that the claim of ben Yochai's authorship was "untenable" but that Moses de León had compiled earlier material. [47] Meir Mazuz (d. 2025) accepts Emden's arguments. [42] Yeshayahu Leibowitz wrote (1990) that "Moses de León composed the Zohar in the 1270s as certainly as Theodor Herzl composed Der Judenstaat in the 1890s ... the Zohar was influential because in every generation the idolatrous influence outpowers the true faith". [48]

Modern critical views

Early attempts included M. H. Landauer's *Vorläufiger Bericht über meine Entdeckung in Ansehung des Sohar* (1845), which fingered Abraham Abulafia as the author, and Samuel David Luzzatto's (1852) *ויכוח על חכמת הקבלה*, but the first systematic and critical academic proof for the authorship of Moses de León was given by Adolf Jellinek in his 1851 monograph "Moses ben Shemtob de León und sein Verhältnis zum Sohar". Jellinek's proofs, which combined previous analyses with Isaac of Acre's testimony and comparison of the Zohar to de León's Hebrew works, were accepted by every other major scholar in the field, including Heinrich Graetz (*History of the Jews*, vol. 7), Moritz Steinschneider, Bernhard Beer, Leopold Zunz, and Christian David Ginsburg. Ginsburg summarized Jellinek's, Graetz's, and other scholars' proofs for the English-reading world in 1865, also introducing several novel proofs, including that the Zohar includes a translation of a poem by Solomon ibn Gabirol (d. 1058) and that it includes a mystical explanation of a mezuzah style only introduced in the 13th century.[49] Adolf Neubauer and Samuel Rolles Driver were convinced by these arguments, but Edward Bouverie Pusey held to a Tannaitic date.[50]

By 1913, the critical view had apparently lost some support: Israel Abrahams recalls that "Zunz, like Graetz, had little patience with the Zohar . . . at this date we are much more inclined to treat the Kabbalah with respect." [51]

Gershom Scholem, who was to found modern academic study of Kabbalah, began his career at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1925 with a lecture in which he promised to refute Graetz and Jellinek.[9] However, after years of research, he came to conclusions similar to theirs by 1938, when he argued again that de León was the most likely author. Scholem noted the Zohar's frequent errors in Aramaic grammar, its suspicious traces of Arabic and Spanish words and sentence patterns, and its lack of knowledge of the Land of Israel, among other proofs.[2]

Scholem's views are widely held as accurate among historians of Kabbalah, but they are not uncritically accepted. Scholars who continue to research the background of the Zohar include Yehuda Liebes (who wrote his doctorate thesis for Scholem on the subject, *Dictionary of the Vocabulary of the Zohar* in 1976), and Daniel C. Matt, a student of Scholem's who has published a critical edition of the Zohar.[52]

Influences

Academic studies of the Zohar show that many of its ideas are based in the Talmud, various works of midrash, and earlier Jewish mystical works. Scholem writes:[2]

The writer had expert knowledge of the early material and he often used it as a foundation for his expositions, putting into it variations of his own. His main sources were the Babylonian Talmud, the complete Midrash Rabbah, the Midrash Tanhuma, and the two Pesiktot (Pesikta De-Rav Kahana or Pesikta Rabbati), the Midrash on Psalms, the Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, and the Targum Onkelos. Generally speaking, they are not quoted exactly, but translated into the peculiar style of the Zohar and summarized. [...]

Less use is made of the halakhic Midrashim, the Jerusalem Talmud, and the other Targums, nor of the Midrashim like the Aggadat Shir ha-Shirim, the Midrash on Proverbs, and the Alfabet de-R. Akiva. It is not clear whether the author used the Yalkut Simeoni, or whether he knew the sources of its aggadah separately. Of the smaller Midrashim he used the Heikhalot Rabbati, the Alfabet de-Ben Sira, the Sefer Zerubabel, the Baraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit, [and many others] [...]

At the same time, Scholem says, the author "invent[ed] a number of fictitious works that the Zohar supposedly quotes, e.g., the Sifra de-Adam, the Sifra de-Hanokh, the Sifra di-Shelomo Malka, the Sifra de-Rav Hamnuna Sava, the Sifra de-Rav Yeiva Sava, the Sifra de-Aggadeta, the Raza de-Razin and many others."

The Zohar also draws from the Bible commentaries written by medieval

rabbis, including Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, David Kimhi and even authorities as late as Nachmanides and Maimonides, and earlier mystical texts such as the Sefer Yetzirah and the Bahir and the medieval writings of the Hasidei Ashkenaz.

Another influence that Scholem, and scholars like Yehudah Liebes and Ronit Meroz have identified[53] was a circle of Spanish Kabbalists in Castile who dealt with the appearance of an evil side emanating from within the world of the sefirot. Scholem saw this dualism of good and evil within the Godhead as a kind of gnostic inclination within Kabbalah, and as a predecessor of the Sitra Ahra (the other, evil side) in the Zohar. The main text of the Castile circle, the Treatise on the Left Emanation, was written by Jacob ha-Cohen around 1265.[54]

Contents

Printings, editions, and indexing

Tikunei haZohar was first printed in Mantua in 1557. The main body of the Zohar was printed in Cremona in 1558 (a one-volume edition), in Mantua in 1558-1560 (a three-volume edition), and in Salonika in 1597 (a two-volume edition). Each of these editions included somewhat different texts.[55] When they were printed there were many partial manuscripts in circulation that were not available to the first printers. These were later printed as Zohar Chadash (lit. 'New Radiance'), but Zohar Chadash actually contains parts that pertain to the Zohar, as well as Tikunim (plural of Tikun, "Repair", see also Tikkun olam) that are akin to Tikunei haZohar, as described below. The term Zohar, in usage, may refer to just the first Zohar collection, with or without the applicable sections of Zohar Chadash, or to the entire Zohar and Tikunim.

Citations referring to the Zohar conventionally follow the volume and page numbers of the Mantua edition, while citations referring to Tikkunei haZohar follow the edition of Ortakoy (Constantinople) 1719 whose text and pagination became the basis for most subsequent editions. Volumes II and III

begin their numbering anew, so citation can be made by parashah and page number (e.g. Zohar: Nasso 127a), or by volume and page number (e.g. Zohar III:127a).[citation needed]

An 1809 edition of the Zohar, printed in Slavuta, as seen in POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

The New Zohar (זוהר חדש)

After the book of the Zohar had been printed (in Mantua and in Cremona, in the Jewish years 5318–5320 or 1558–1560? CE), many more manuscripts were found that included paragraphs pertaining to the Zohar which had not been included in printed editions. The manuscripts pertained also to all parts of the Zohar; some were similar to Zohar on the Torah, some were similar to the inner parts of the Zohar (Midrash haNe'elam, Sitrei Otiyot and more), and some pertained to Tikunei haZohar. Some thirty years after the first edition of the Zohar was printed, the manuscripts were gathered and arranged according to the parashiyot of the Torah and the megillot (apparently the arrangement was done by the Kabbalist, Avraham haLevi of Tsfat), and were printed first in Salonika in Jewish year 5357 (1587? CE), and then in Kraków (5363), and afterwards in various editions.[56]

Structure

According to Scholem, the Zohar can be divided into 21 types of content, of which the first 18 (a.–s.) are the work of the original author (probably de Leon) and the final 3 (t.–v.) are the work of a later imitator.

a. Untitled Torah commentary

A "bulky part" which is "wholly composed of discursive commentaries on various passages from the Torah".[2]

b. Book of Concealment (ספרא דצניעותא)

A short part of only six pages, containing a commentary to the first six chapters of Genesis. It is "highly oracular and obscure," citing no authorities and explaining nothing.

c. Greater Assembly (אדרא רבא)

This part contains an explanation of the oracular hints in the previous section. Ben Yochai's friends gather together to discuss secrets of Kabbalah. After the opening of the discussion by ben Yochai, the sages rise, one after the other, and lecture on the secret of Divinity, while ben Yochai adds to and responds to their words. The sages become steadily more ecstatic until three of them die. Scholem calls this part "architecturally perfect."

d. Lesser Assembly (אדרא זוטא)

Ben Yochai dies and a speech is quoted in which he explains the previous section.

e. Assembly of the Tabernacle (אדרא דמשכנא)

This part has the same structure as c. but discusses instead the mysticism of prayer.

f. Palaces (היכלות)

Seven palaces of light are described, which are perceived by the devout in death. This description appears again in another passage, heavily embellished.

g. Secretum Secretorum (רזא דרזין)

An anonymous discourse on physiognomy and a discourse on chiromancy by ben Yochai.

h. Old Man (סבא)

An elaborate narrative about a speech by an old Kabbalist.

i. Child (ינוקא)

A story of a prodigy and his Kabbalistic speech.

k. Head of the Academy (רב מתיבתא)

A Pardes narrative in which a head of the celestial academy reveals secrets about the destinies of the soul.

l. Secrets of Torah (סתרי תורה)

Allegorical and mystical interpretations of Torah passages.

m. Mishnas (מתניתין)

Imitations of the Mishnaic style, designed to introduce longer commentaries in the style of the Talmud.

n. Zohar to the Song of Songs

Kabbalistic commentary to the Song of Songs.

o. Standard of Measure (קו המידה)

Profound interpretation of Deut. 6:4.

p. Secrets of Letters (סתרי אותיות)

A monologue by ben Yochai on the letters in the names of God and their use in creation.

q. Commentary to the Merkabah

r. Mystical Midrash (מדרש הנעלם)

A Kabbalistic commentary on the Torah, citing a wide variety of Talmudic sages. According to Ramaz, it is fit to be called Midrash haNe'elam because "its topic is mostly the neshamah (an upper level of soul), the source of which is in Beri'ah, which is the place of the upper Gan Eden; and it is written in the Pardes that drash is in Beri'ah... and the revealed midrash is the secret of externality, and Midrash haNe'elam is the secret of internality, which is the neshamah. And this derush is founded on the neshamah; its name befits it—Midrash haNe'elam.[57]

The language of Midrash haNe'elam is sometimes Hebrew, sometimes Aramaic, and sometimes both mixed. Unlike the body of the Zohar, its drashot are short and not long. Also, the topics it discusses—the work of Creation, the nature of the soul, the days of Mashiach, and Olam Haba—are not of the type found in the Zohar, which are the nature of God, the emanation of worlds, the "forces" of evil, and more.

s. Mystic Midrash on Ruth

A commentary on the Book of Ruth in the same style.

t. Faithful Shepherd (רעיא מהימנא)

By far the largest "book" included in the Zohar, this is a Kabbalistic commentary on Moses' teachings revealed to ben Yochai and his friends.[56] Moshe Cordovero said, "Know that this book, which is called Ra'aya Meheimna, which ben Yochai made with the tzadikim who are in Gan Eden,

was a repair of the Shekhinah, and an aid and support for it in the exile, for there is no aid or support for the Shekhinah besides the secrets of the Torah... And everything that he says here of the secrets and the concepts—it is all with the intention of unifying the Shekhinah and aiding it during the exile.[58]

u. Rectifications of the Zohar (תקוני זוהר)

Main article: Tikunei haZohar

Tikunei haZohar, which was printed as a separate book, includes seventy commentaries called Tikunim (lit. 'Repairs') and an additional eleven Tikunim. In some editions, Tikunim are printed that were already printed in the Zohar Chadash, which in their content and style also pertain to Tikunei haZohar.[56]

Each of the seventy Tikunim of Tikunei haZohar begins by explaining the word Bereshit (בראשית), and continues by explaining other verses, mainly in parashat Bereshit, and also from the rest of Tanakh. And all this is in the way of Sod, in commentaries that reveal the hidden and mystical aspects of the Torah.

Tikunei haZohar and Ra'aya Meheimna are similar in style, language, and concepts, and are different from the rest of the Zohar. For example, the idea of the Four Worlds is found in Tikunei haZohar and Ra'aya Meheimna but not elsewhere, as is true of the very use of the term "Kabbalah". In terminology, what is called Kabbalah in Tikunei haZohar and Ra'aya Meheimna is simply called razin (clues or hints) in the rest of the Zohar.[59] In Tikunei haZohar there are many references to chibura kadma'ah (meaning "the earlier book"). This refers to the main body of the Zohar.[59]

v. Further Additions

These include later Tikkunim and other texts in the same style.

Influence

Judaism

On the one hand, the Zohar was lauded by many rabbis because it opposed religious formalism, stimulated one's imagination and emotions, and for many people helped reinvigorate the experience of prayer.[7] In many places prayer had become a mere external religious exercise, while prayer was supposed to be a means of transcending earthly affairs and placing oneself in union with God.[7]

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "On the other hand, the Zohar was censured by many rabbis because it propagated many superstitious beliefs, and produced a host of mystical dreamers, whose overexcited imaginations peopled the world with spirits, demons, and all kinds of good and bad influences." [7] Many classical rabbis, especially Maimonides, viewed all such beliefs as a violation of Jewish principles of faith. Its mystic mode of explaining some commandments was applied by its commentators to all religious observances, and produced a strong tendency to substitute mystic Judaism in the place of traditional Rabbinic Judaism.[7] For example, Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath, began to be looked upon as the embodiment of God in temporal life, and every ceremony performed on that day was considered to have an influence upon the superior world.[7]

Elements of the Zohar crept into the liturgy of the 16th and 17th centuries, and the religious poets not only used the allegorism and symbolism of the Zohar in their compositions, but even adopted its style, e.g. the use of erotic terminology to illustrate the relations between man and God.[7] Thus, in the language of some Jewish poets, the beloved one's curls indicate the mysteries of the Deity; sensuous pleasures, and especially intoxication, typify the highest degree of divine love as ecstatic contemplation; while the wine-room represents merely the state through which the human qualities

merge or are exalted into those of God.[7]

The Zohar is also credited with popularizing de Leon's PaRDeS codification of biblical exegesis.[citation needed]

Christian mysticism

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "The enthusiasm felt for the Zohar was shared by many Christian scholars, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Johann Reuchlin, Aegidius of Viterbo, etc., all of whom believed that the book contained proofs of the truth of Christianity.[60] They were led to this belief by the analogies existing between some of the teachings of the Zohar and certain Christian dogmas, such as the fall and redemption of man, and the dogma of the Trinity, which seems to be expressed in the Zohar in the following terms:

The Ancient of Days has three heads. He reveals himself in three archetypes, all three forming but one. He is thus symbolized by the number Three. They are revealed in one another. [These are:] first, secret, hidden 'Wisdom'; above that the Holy Ancient One; and above Him the Unknowable One. None knows what He contains; He is above all conception. He is therefore called for man 'Non-Existing' [Ayin][60] (Zohar, iii. 288b).

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, "This and other similar doctrines found in the Zohar are now known to be much older than Christianity, but the Christian scholars who were led by the similarity of these teachings to certain Christian dogmas deemed it their duty to propagate the Zohar." [60]

Commentaries

The first known commentary on the book of Zohar, Ketem Paz, was written by Simeon Lavi of Libya.

Another important and influential commentary on Zohar, 22-volume Or Yakar, was written by Moshe Cordovero of the Tzfat (i.e. Safed) kabbalistic school in the 16th century.

The Vilna Gaon authored a commentary on the Zohar.

Tzvi Hirsch of Zidichov wrote a commentary on the Zohar entitled Ateres Tzvi.

A major commentary on the Zohar is the Sulam written by Yehuda Ashlag.

A full translation of the Zohar into Hebrew was made by the late Daniel Frish of Jerusalem under the title Masok MiDvash.

English translations

Berg, Michael: Zohar 23 Volume Set- The Kabbalah Centre International. Full 23 Volumes English translation with commentary and annotations.

Matt, Daniel C., Nathan Wolski, & Joel Hecker, trans. The Zohar: Pritzker Edition (12 vols.) Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004–2017.

Matt, Daniel C. Zohar: Annotated and Explained. Woodstock, Vt.: SkyLights Paths Publishing Co., 2002. (Selections)

Matt, Daniel C. Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment. New York: Paulist Press, 1983. (Selections)

Scholem, Gershom, ed. Zohar: The Book of Splendor. New York: Schocken Books, 1963. (Selections)

Sperling, Harry and Maurice Simon, eds. The Zohar (5 vols.). London: Soncino Press.

Tishby, Isaiah, ed. The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts (3 vols.). Translated from the Hebrew by David Goldstein. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Simeon Ben Yochai. Sefer ha Zohar (Vol. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 English). Createspace, 2015

See also

Judaism portal

Baqashot

Notes

The Biblical Hebrew word zohar appears only in the vision of Ezekiel 8:2, "And I saw, and there was a figure with the appearance of fire [in MT; other versions, a man]; the appearance of his loins and below, fire; his loins and above, like the appearance of zohar, like the look of hashmala", and in Daniel 12:3, "The sages will yazhiru like the zohar of the sky, and those who make the masses righteous, like stars forever and ever."

In the Zohar and later works which adopt its stylings, ben Yochai is usually called "bar Yochai" in the Aramaic fashion. However, as a Palestinian Tannaitic sage, he is properly called "ben Yochai," as he is in genuinely ancient texts without exception.

According to the view of Isaiah Tishby, the text was always in Aramaic but early Kabbalists sometimes translated quotations into Hebrew.

For discussion of de Leon's other forgeries, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Hai Gaon's Letter and Commentary on Aleynu: Further Evidence of Moses de León's Pseudepigraphic Activity," JQR 81 (1991), pp. 365-409; and the sources cited by Shmuel Glick, Eshnav le-Sifrut ha-Teshuvot (New York, 2012), pp. 237-238.

Modern scholars have shown that the Zohar contains no Palestinian Aramaic at all, instead relying on Babylonian sources for its grammar and vocabulary.

In his Otzar haChayyim. Ed. Yehuda Ohad Turgeman (2019). p. 230.

In MSS and printings corrupted to "Defan Corpo" and first read this way by Yitzhak Baer; cf. Scholem, "Did Moses de Leon write the Zohar?" [Hebrew] (1926)

"Don Jucaf de Ávila" is mentioned in period Spanish documents according to Yitzhak Baer; see Scholem, Did Moses de Leon write the Zohar? [Hebrew] (1926), p. 18 n. 8.

Similar discrepancies exist between scribal practice in torah scrolls and the

Talmud.

References

Scholem, Gershom and Melila Hellner-Eshed. "Zohar". Encyclopaedia Judaica. Ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 21. 2nd ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. 647–664. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Gale.

Scholem, Gershom Gerhard, (1897-1982) (1995). Major trends in Jewish mysticism. Schocken Books. pp. 163ff. OCLC 949119809.

Kahn, Lily (2018-07-10). Jewish languages in historical perspective. BRILL. ISBN 978-90-04-37658-8. OCLC 1241800125.

"משנת הזוהר - כך ראשון". www.bialik-publishing.co.il. pp. 77–8. Retrieved 2023-11-14.

Tishby, Isaiah (1989-09-01). The Wisdom of the Zohar: Anthology of Texts. Liverpool University Press. ISBN 978-1-909821-82-8.

Neubauer, A. (1892). "The Bahir and the Zohar". The Jewish Quarterly Review. 4 (3): 357–368. doi:10.2307/1450272. ISSN 0021-6682. JSTOR 1450272.

Jacobs, Joseph; Broydé, Isaac. "Zohar". Jewish Encyclopedia. Funk & Wagnalls Company.

Kaplan, Aryeh (1985-01-01). Meditation and Kabbalah. Weiser Books. p. 28. ISBN 978-0-87728-616-5.

Scholem, Gershon. "Ha-im Hibber R. Mosheh de Leon et Sefer ha-Zohar," Mad'ei ha-Yahadut I (1926), p. 16-29

Huss, Boaz (2016-05-12). The Zohar: Reception and Impact. Liverpool University Press. ISBN 978-1-78962-486-1.

The Complete Yuchsin Book, third edition (5723), p. XXII "ובדף קל"ג השמיט "המוציא לאור את המאמר על דבר ספר הזוהר (English: "And on page 133 the publisher erased the essay concerning the matter of the book of the Zohar.")

Available at HebrewBooks.org: ספר יוחסין השלם, p. 88-89 / 95-96 (Hebrew).

Dan Rabinowitz in Hakirah, The Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and

Thought, volume 2 (fall 2015), Nekkudot: The Dots that Connect Us, p. 64.

Wolff, Johannes Christoph (1721). *Bibliotheca Hebraea* (in Latin). Felgineri Viduam. p. 1121.

Penkower, Jordan S. "S.D. Luzzatto, vowels and accents, and the date of the Zohar". www.nli.org.il. Retrieved 2023-11-14.

ה-14, אבן וקאר, יוסף בן אברהם, המאה (2004). ספר שרשי הקבלה. *Hotsa'at Keruv*. ISBN 0-9747505-6-5. OCLC 58404406.

Moritz Steinschneider, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1925, p. 171

Schechter, Solomon (1902). מדרש הגדול: על המשה חומשי תורה, ספר בראשית, הוצא. (in Hebrew). at the University Press. pp. XIII.

The Zohar, volume 1, by Daniel C. Matt. [...] but upon examining many of the original manuscripts of the Zohar dating from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries [...]

Bechinat ha-Dat ed. Vienna, 1833, p. 43, in the Jacobs and Broyde, "The Zohar", *Jewish Encyclopedia*

Shifra Baruchson, *Sefarim ve-korim: tarbut ha-keriah shel Yehude Italyah be-shilhe haRenesans* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), 160.

See also Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. 33, p. 98, which argues that where there is an argument between Kabbalah and poskim, the former should be followed. This view is explicitly rejected by most modern authorities, including the Aruch HaShulchan (OC 25:29) and the Mishnah Berurah (25:42). See also David ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra (*Chelek* 4, *Siman* 1,111) and Tzvi Ashkenazi (*Siman* 36) (cited in Yonah Gerondi's *Shaarei Teshuva* 25:14). See also the Responsa of Menachem Schneerson (*Responsa Tzemach Tzedek* A.H. *Siman* 18,4) and *Divrei Nechemia* (*Responsa Divrei Nechemia* O.H. 21). The views of the Radvaz and of the Chacham Tzvi are that one should follow the opinion of the Zohar only where a conclusive statement has not been made by the legal authorities (*Gemara* or *Poskim*), or when an argument is found between the *Poskim*.

Responsa #98. Luria says, "ודע אהו' שכל רבותי ואבותי הקדושים ששמשו גאוני עולם",
ראיתי מהם שלא נהגו כך אלא כדברי התלמוד והפוסקים ואם היה רשב"י עומד לפנינו ונוח

לשנות המנהג שנהגו הקדמונים לא אשגחין ביה כי ברוב דבריו אין הלכה כמותו **Know, my dear, that I witnessed all of my holy teachers and ancestors, who serve the great masters of yore, go against this practice, instead acting according to the Talmud and the decisors. And were Simeon ben Yohai himself to stand before us and set about changing the custom of the ancients, we would pay him no mind, because most of his teachings are contrary to the Law".** N.b. that Simon Hurwitz's English edition of Luria's responsa (1938), available on Sefaria, is a paraphrase which should only be used with extreme caution. See Jacob Menkes, "The Maharshal", *Journal of Jewish Bibliography* 1:3 (April 1939) p. 86-93.

Tur, Yoreh Deah, Siman 65, note 12 of Isserles's Darkhei Moshe. Hebrew original: שמעתי כי בעל ספר הזוהר הוא סתם ר' שמעון המוזכר בתלמוד שהוא ר"ש בן יוחאי.

Jordan S. Penkower, A Renewed Inquiry into Massoret Ha-Massoret of Elijah Levita: Lateness of Vocalization and Criticism of the Zohar (in Hebrew) pg. 35

François Secret, Le Zôhar chez les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance (Paris: Mouton, 1964), 99–102

Drusius discussed the lateness of the Zohar and pointed to the importance of Sefer Yuhasin by Zacut in 1616 letter. See Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, "I have always loved the Holy Tongue": Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 325, n. 62.

Responsa IV:1,111

Responsa IV:1,172

Besamim Rosh (1793), 4th unnumbered page. All reprints of this work, including that listed as the 1793 on HebrewBooks, excise Berlin's introduction.

In derush 25 which "had previously only appeared in a censored form" (Rabbi Dr. Marc Shapiro, Concerning the Zohar and Other Matters) in Derushei HaTzlach, Warsaw 1886 (Shapiro in Milin Havivin Volume 5 [2011], Is there an obligation to believe that Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai wrote the Zohar?, p. ה [PDF page 126], footnote 13 [Hebrew]).

In a portion of derush 25 first published by Yehoshua Mondshine in Or Yisrael, Nisan 5766, ק ותוספות מאחרות שנשתרבבו לתוכו, (Hebrew), p. 202 (highlighted by Shapiro in Concerning the Zohar and Other Matters). This portion (along with the remainder) was later published, from manuscript, by Dr. Maoz Kahana and Michael K. Silber in Deists, Sabbatians and Kabbalists in Prague: A Censored Sermon of R. Ezekiel Landau, 1770, Kabbalah 21 (2010), p. 355 (Hebrew).

Huss, Boaz (2016-05-12). The Zohar: Reception and Impact. Liverpool University Press. ISBN 978-1-78962-486-1.

Luzzatto, Samuel David (1852). יכוח על חוכמת הכבלה: ועל קדמות ספר הזוהר (in Hebrew). Imprimerie de J.B. Seitz.

Landau, Moses Israel (1822). Geist und Sprache der Hebräer nach dem zweyten Tempelbau (in German). Gedruckt in der Schollischen Buchdruckerey. pp. 13–31.

ch. 21 מגן וצינה

"Concerning the Zohar and Other Matters – The Seforim Blog". 29 August 2012. Retrieved 2022-07-04.

"HebrewBooks.org Sefer Detail: "ספר ראביה -- מילזהגי, אליקים בן יהודה". www.hebrewbooks.org. p. 30c-33a. Retrieved 2023-11-14.

"(PDF). "ספר מלחמות ה"

Geiger, Shlomo Zalman. "HebrewBooks.org Sefer Detail: דברי קהלת -- גיגר, "שלמה זלמן בן אהרן יחיאל מיכל". hebrewbooks.org. p. 60. Retrieved 2023-05-21.

"Sinai". Daat.ac.il. Retrieved 2012-06-06.

Shapiro, Marc (2010). האם יש חיוב להאמין שהזוהר נכתב על ידי שמעון בן יוחאי? ". מילין ". חביבין (5): 1-20

(page 5 of 559) אגרות משה - חלק ו (או"ח ח"ד, יו"ד ח"ג) - פיינשטיין, משה בן דוד, 1895-1986 " www.hebrewbooks.org.

An Analysis of the Authenticity of the Zohar (2005), p. 39, with "Rav E" and "Rav G" later identified by the author as Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and Rabbi

Gedaliah Nadel, respectively (Rabbi Dr. Marc Shapiro in Milin Havivin Volume 5 [2011], Is there an obligation to believe that Rebbe Shimon bar Yochai wrote the Zohar?, p. ב' [PDF page 133]):

"I approached Rav A [Aryeh Carmell] with some of the questions on the Zohar, and he responded to me - 'and what about nikud? Nikud is also mentioned in the Zohar despite the fact that it [is] from Geonic times!' he said. I later found this comment in the Mitpachas Seforim. I would just add that not only is nikud mentioned, but only the Tiberian Nikkud - the norm in Europe of the middle ages - is mentioned and not the Yerushalmi nikud or the Babylonian one — which was used then in the Middle East, and is still used by Yemenites today. Also the Taamay Hamikrah - the trop - are referred to in the Zohar - only by their Sefardi Names. Rav A told me a remarkable piece of testimony: 'My rebbe (this is how he generally refers to Rav E [Elijah Dessler]) accepted the possibility that the Zohar was written sometime in the 13th century.'"

"Rav G [Gedaliah Nadel] told me that he was still unsure as to the origin and status of the Zohar, but told me it was my absolute right to draw any conclusions I saw fit regarding both the Zohar and the Ari."

Sermons, Addresses and Studies, vol. 3 p. 308.

Belkin, Samuel (1956). "haMidrash haNeelam uMKorotav". Sura (3): 25ff.

Gaster, Moses (1921). "Zohar". In Hastings, James (ed.). Encyclopaedia Of Religion And Ethics Vol.12. pp. 858ff.

[illegible]

Ginsburg, Christian David (1865). The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development, and Literature. An Essay, Etc.

Neubauer, Adolf; Driver, Samuel Rolles (1877). The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah according to the Jewish interpreters: Translations, by S.R. Driver and A. Naubauer. Рипол Классик. pp. iv. ISBN 978-5-88085-233-8.

Abrahams, Israel (1920). By-Paths in Hebraic Bookland. p. 119.

Webmaster. "The Zohar: Pritzker Edition". www.sup.org. Retrieved 2023-09-

04.

"A mysterious medieval text, decrypted - The Boston Globe". The Boston Globe.

Dan, Joseph Kabbalah: a Very Short Introduction, Oxford University Press, 2006, p 22

Doktór, Jan; Bendowska, Magda (2012). "Sefer haZohar – the Battle for Editio Princeps". Jewish History Quarterly. 2 (242): 141–161. Archived from the original on 2 February 2014. Retrieved 30 January 2014.

Much of the information on contents and sections of the Zohar is found in the book Ohr haZohar(אור הזוהר) by Rabbi Yehuda Shalom Gross, in Hebrew, published by Mifal Zohar Hoilumi, Ramat Beth Shemesh, Israel, Heb. year 5761 (2001 CE); also available at http://israel613.com/HA-ZOHAR/OR_HAZOHAR_2.htm Archived 2012-04-10 at the Wayback Machine, accessed March 1, 2012; explicit permission is given in both the printed and electronic book "to whoever desires to print paragraphs from this book, or the entire book, in any language, in any country, in order to increase Torah and fear of Heaven in the world and to awaken hearts our brothers the children of Yisrael in complete teshuvah".

the Ramaz, brought in Mikdash Melekh laZohar, parashat Vayeira, Zalkova edition, p. 100

Ohr haChamah laZohar, part 2, p. 115b, in the name of the Ramak

According to Rabbi Yaakov Siegel, in an email dated February 29, 2012, to ~Nissimnanach

Jacobs, Joseph; Broydé, Isaac. "Zohar". Jewish Encyclopedia. Funk & Wagnalls Company.

Further reading

Beyer, Klaus. "Aramaic language, its distribution and subdivisions". 1986. (from reference 2 above)

Tenen, Stan, Zohar, "B'reshit, and the Meru Hypothesis: Scholars debate the origins of Zohar", Meru Foundation eTorus Newsletter #40, July 2007

Blumenthal, David R. "Three is not enough: Jewish Reflections on Trinitarian Thinking" Archived 2006-12-08 at the Wayback Machine, in Ethical Monotheism, Past and Present: Essays in Honor of Wendell S. Dietrich, ed. T. Vial and M. Hadley (Providence, RI), Brown Judaic Studies:

The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism, Geoffrey Dennis, Llewellyn Worldwide, 2007

Studies in the Zohar, Yehuda Liebes (Author), SUNY Press, SUNY series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, 1993

"Challenging the Master: Moshe Idel's critique of Gershom Scholem" Micha Odenheimer, MyJewishLearning.Com, Kabbalah and Mysticism

Scholem, Gershom, Zohar in Encyclopadeia Judaica, Keter Publishing

Scholem, Gershom, "Kabbalah" in Encyclopadeia Judaica, Keter Publishing

Margolies, Reuvein "Peninim U' Margolies" and "Nitzotzei Zohar" (Heb.), Mossad R' Kook

Luria, David "Kadmus Sefer Ha'Zohar" (Heb.)

Unterman, Alan Reinterpreting Mysticism and Messianism, MyJewishLearning.Com, Kabbalah and Mysticism

Adler, Jeremy, "Beyond the Law: the artistry and enduring counter-cultural power of the kabbala" Archived 2007-01-04 at the Wayback Machine, Times Literary Supplement 24 February 2006, reviewing: Daniel C Matt, translator The Zohar; Arthur Green A Guide to the Zohar; Moshe Idel Kabbalah and Eros.

External links

This article's use of external links may not follow Wikipedia's policies or guidelines. Please improve this article by removing excessive or inappropriate external links, and converting useful links where appropriate into footnote references. (September 2022) (Learn how and when to remove this message)

Wikimedia Commons has media related to Zohar.

Zohar texts

Wikiquote has quotations related to Zohar.

The current Wikisource logo ספר הזהר, Sefer haZohar, Zohar text in original Aramaic

The current Wikisource logo Translation:Zohar at English Wikisource

Zohar Pages in English, at ha-zohar.net, including the Introduction translated in English, and The Importance of Study of the Zohar, and more

Complete Zohar, Tikkunim, and Zohar Chadash in Aramaic with Hebrew translation, in 10 volumes of PDF, divided for yearly or 3-year learning

A four-pages-per-sheet PDF arrangement of the above, allowing for printing on 3 reams of Letter paper duplex Archived 2021-01-22 at the Wayback Machine

Zohar and Related Booklets in various formats in PDF files, at ha-zohar.net

Sefer haZohar, Mantua edition (1558), at the National Library of Israel, DjVu file

Sefer haZohar, Cremona edition (1559), at the National Library of Israel, DjVu file

Zohar text files (TXT HTML) among grimoar.cz Hebrew Kabbalistic texts collection

The Zohar in English: Bereshith to Lekh Lekha

The Zohar in English: some mystical sections

The Kabbalah Center translation of the Zohar

Original Zohar with Sulam Commentary

Daily Zohar study of Tikunei Zohar in English

Tikkunei Zohar in English, Partial (Intro and Tikkun 1-17) at ha-zohar.info; permanent link

Copy of the Zohar

Links about the Zohar

The Aramaic Language of the Zohar

7 brief video lectures about The Zohar from Kabbalah Education & Research Institute

Zohar and Later Mysticism, a short essay by Israel Abrahams

Notes on the Zohar in English: An Extensive Bibliography

The Zohar Code: The Temple Calendar of King Solomon[permanent dead link]

The Zohar on the website of the National Library of Israel

vte

Jews and Judaism

Authority control databases Edit this at Wikidata

Categories: 1280s booksApocalyptic literatureHebrew-language namesJewish texts in AramaicKabbalah textsVisionary literature

This page was last edited on 9 November 2025, at 07:57 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Yehuda Ashlag

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"Ashlag" redirects here. For other uses, see Ashlag (disambiguation).

Yehuda Ashlag

יְהוּדָה אֶשְׁלָג

Born 1885

Łódź, Congress Poland

Died 1954 (aged 68–69)

Jerusalem

Occupation Rabbi

Yehuda Ashlag (1885–1954) or Yehuda Leib Ha-Levi Ashlag (Hebrew: יהודה לייב אשלג (הַלֵּוִי אֶשְׁלַג), also known as the Baal Ha-Sulam (בַּעַל הַסּוּלָם, "Author of The Ladder") in reference to his magnum opus, was an Orthodox rabbi, kabbalist and anarchist born in Łuków, Congress Poland, Russian Empire, to a family of scholars connected to the Hasidic courts of Porisov and Belz.[1] Rabbi Ashlag lived in the Holy Land from 1922 until his death in 1954 (except for two years in England). In addition to his Sulam commentary on the Zohar, his other primary work, Talmud Eser Sefirot is regarded as the central textbook for students of Kabbalah. Ashlag systematically interpreted the wisdom and promoted its wide dissemination. In line with his directives, many contemporary adherents of Ashlag's teachings strive to spread Kabbalah to the masses.[1]

Biography

Poland

Ashlag reputedly studied Kabbalah from the age of seven, hiding pages from the book Etz Chaim "The Tree of Life" by Rabbi Hayyim ben Joseph Vital in the Talmudic tractate he was meant to be studying.[1] At the age of twelve, he studied the Talmud independently. By nineteen, Ashlag's knowledge of the Torah was profound enough for the rabbis of Warsaw to confer upon him the title of rabbi.

During this period he worked as a judge in the court of the Warsaw rabbis and also gained experience as a teacher for training judges for Jewish courts. Ashlag also studied German while in Warsaw, and read original texts of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Arthur Schopenhauer.[1]

While still in Poland, he met an unidentified Warsaw merchant, who revealed himself to Ashlag as a Kabbalist. Ashlag studied with this particular teacher every night for three months, he said, “until my arrogance separated us,” and the teacher disappeared. A few months later Ashlag met the teacher again, and after pleading with him, convinced him to reveal an important kabbalistic secret. The next day, the teacher died.[1]

Israel

In 1921, at the age of 36, Ashlag made the decision to emigrate to the Land of Israel or Palestine at the time, a journey that took several months.[1] He spent the first few years living anonymously, supporting his family through manual labor by day and writing his commentaries at night. Eventually, he was recognized through his work, and was appointed Rabbi of Givat Shaul, Jerusalem in 1924.[1]

Ashlag was friendly with the Kabbalist and Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, Abraham Isaac Kook, who recognized Ashlag as a great follower of Isaac Luria. Ashlag had high hopes of meeting great Kabbalists in Jerusalem including the Sephardi followers of the great 18th-century Yemeni Jewish Kabbalist Shalom Sharabi. However, he was profoundly disappointed by his encounter with them. Their views about Kabbalah ran contrary to Ashlag's experience with the teaching as a means of profound personal transformation and spiritual illumination, by becoming a vessel for divine light.[1]

In 1926 Ashlag left for London, and it was there that he wrote his commentary on The Arizal's (Isaac Luria) book Etz Chaim. This work is entitled Panim Meiros wMasbirot. It took him one and a half years to complete this work. It was published in 1927, and in 1928 Ashlag returned to the Land of Israel (Mandatory Palestine).[1]

In 1932 Ashlag and his family moved to Jaffa. During this period, Ashlag also began one of his main works, Talmud Eser Sefirot, a commentary on all the writings of Isaac Luria.[2] In this undertaking, he developed a comprehensive explanation of the sequence of the creation of all of the upper worlds (Olamot Elyonim), starting with the source of emanation (Ma'atzil) and finishing with our world (Olam HaZeh). The work is divided into six volumes, containing sixteen parts and over two thousand pages. Some today consider it as the core of the entire teaching of Kabbalah.

In the 1930s Ashlag, now in his fifties, gathered around him a group of disciples, including Rav Yehuda Tzvi Brandwein, his closest student, and studied Kabbalah every night, often from shortly after midnight until dawn. He also authored many articles and letters at this time that openly promoted the study of Kabbalah on a mass scale.[1] Ashlag went to great lengths to publish Kabbalistic material in media suitable for disseminating the knowledge he had acquired across the entire nation. He began an independent Kabbalistic newsletter publication, HaUma "The Nation", of which only one issue survived.[3]

Ohel of Yehuda Ashlag on Har HaMenuchoth

Ashlag differs fundamentally from all Kabbalists of the past, who studied and taught Kabbalah in a concealed manner, in that he felt a great need to reveal and clarify the teaching of Kabbalah to the masses.[1] This was because he saw that the evil inclination in people (human egoism) would rise to an altogether new height in this era of humanity, causing an altogether new era of internal suffering felt as a meaningless and confused existence. [2][4]

Writing of the Sulam

In 1943, Ashlag moved to Tel Aviv, and there began working on his book, HaSulam (The Ladder), a collection of commentaries on The Zohar. During this period, he wrote for eighteen hours a day, and due to a lack of money he

was not able to afford a sufficient amount of paper and ink to write more precise explanations. He later said that if it had been within his capabilities, he would have written a full commentary on The Zohar in two-hundred volumes, but he was unable to begin the work only because of a lack of means.[5]

He completed this work in 1953, and later added three more volumes. Rav Ashlag's closest student Rav Yehuda Tzvi Brandwein later finished the work by adding this three volumes called Tikkunei HaZohar "Maalot Hasulam". In honor of the completion of the entire work, his students organized a big feast in Meron, where Ashlag gave the speech that is today printed under the title "Maamar LeSiyum HaZohar" ("An Article for the Completion of the Zohar," also known as "Speech in Celebration for the Conclusion of the Zohar").[5] Yehuda Ashlag died on the day of Yom Kippur in 1954. He was buried on cemetery Har HaMenuhot located in Givat Shaul, Jerusalem, Israel.

Rabbi Brandwein

Rabbi Yehudah Tzvi Brandwein a direct descendant of the famous first Admor of Stretin, Rabbi Yehudah Tzvi of Stretin, was a foremost disciple of Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi Ashlag (Baal HaSulam). His vast knowledge of the Lurianic system of Kabbalah enabled him to codify and edit the entire writings of the Ari HaKadosh, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria. He continued with a similar style of translation and commentary of Rabbi Yehudah Ashlag known as Maalot HaSulam (Extension of the Ladder) on those works of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, which Rabbi Ashlag didn't complete during his lifetime, namely Hashmatot HaZohar (Various other Writings) and Tikkunei HaZohar.

Rabbi Brandwein was one of the first Jewish settlers within the Old City of Jerusalem after the Six Day War.

Rabbi Yehuda Zvi Brandwein ran a religious school in Jerusalem called

Yeshiva Kol Yehudah, founded in 1922 by Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag. For a while he also served as the chief rabbi for the Histadrut - the Israeli labor union, using his position to bring many secular Israelis back to Judaism.

Books

Ashlag wrote and published two major works. The first, Talmud Eser Sefirot is a complete re-editing and commentary to the works of 16th century Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria. This is a comprehensive exposition of the system of the upper worlds, Partzufim and Sefirot, in the scientific language of Kabbalah which was developed by Luria.[2]

As a core Kabbalistic text, it is especially unique in its utmost precision to detail to the structural organization and processes occurring in the upper worlds. It is set out as a comprehensive textbook, complete with commentaries, a section in each chapter dedicated to further reflection upon the commentaries, definitions of terms, tables of questions and answers, an introduction clarifying how to study Kabbalah in the correct manner, and also a summarized preface of the entire text.[2]

His other masterwork was his Sulam commentary on The Zohar, which earned him the name “Baal HaSulam”. This monumental work took him ten years to complete, written between the years 1943 and 1953. It includes a translation of The Zohar from Aramaic to Hebrew as well as an extensive interpretation.

Another publication is the notebook of Yehuda Ashlag's son and disciple, Baruch Ashlag. His notebook, entitled Shamati (I Heard)], contains over two hundred articles which were copied down from lessons and talks with his father. Baruch Ashlag kept this notebook with him in secret, until he was on his deathbed, in 1991. It was later published in Hebrew and has been translated into many different languages. The articles in Shamati form a unique kabbalistic work in their emotional depth of capturing the inner processes that a Kabbalist goes through on the path of spiritual attainment.

Works of Interest

Matan Torah (Gift of the Torah)

Perush HaSulam (Commentary of the Ladder on the Zohar)

Talmud Eser haSefirot (Study of the Ten Luminous Emanations)

Panim Meirot u'Masbirot (Welcoming and Illuminating Revelations)

Ha'Akadama Le Talmud Eser haSefirot (Introduction to the Ten Luminous Emanations)

Ha'Akadama Le Sefer HaZohar (Introduction to the Zohar)

Mavo le Sefer HaZohar (Entrance to the Zohar)

Pticha le Hokhmat haKabbalah (Opening to the Wisdom of Kabbalah)

Sefer haIlan (Book of the Tree or Book of Illustrations)

Pticha le Perush haSulam (Opening to the Sulam Commentary)

Ha'Akadama Le Sefer Panim Meirot u'Masbirot (Introduction to Panim Meirot u'Masbirot [Welcoming and Illuminating Revelations])

Pticha Kolelet leSefer Panim Meirot u'Masbirot (Opening to Panim Meirot u'Masbirot [Welcoming and Illuminating Revelations])

Teachings

Ashlag's commentary offered a systematic interpretation of the legacy of Isaac Luria. This was the first since the 18th century when the Baal Shem Tov, Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, the Vilna Gaon and Shalom Sharabi offered their interpretation of Luria's teaching. Ashlag's system focused on the transformation of human consciousness from the "desire to receive" to the "desire to give," i.e., from egocentricity to altruism. This path of transformation is described in Lurianic Kabbalah.

Ashlag stated that the purpose of studying Kabbalah is equal to the purpose

of why human beings were created, and that through its study, a person is capable of revealing the entirety of processes and structures that have taken place in the creation of the universe.[6][7]

"Equivalence of form" with this source means having the same attributes or qualities as it, and Ashlag defines the qualities of this source as being altruistic, namely the desire to give, or in Ashlag's words, the "will to bestow" (Ratzon LeHashpia).[8][9]

Through intensive study of Kabbalah, a person's desire to give to others is developed in relation to this goal. Ashlag believed that the coming of the Messiah meant that humans would attain this quality which would allow them to give up their selfishness and devote themselves to loving each other for the sake of life's purpose, as stated in the commandment "love thy neighbor as thyself." [8]

Ashlag had strong political opinions, believing in a religious version of anarcho-communism, based on principles of Kabbalah. Though his anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist ideas show some Marxist influence, he strongly opposed communism instituted by force and believed in "developing a community based on love between its members and a society founded on economic justice." [1] He supported the Kibbutz movement and preached to establish a network of self-ruled internationalist communes, who would eventually "annul the brute-force regime completely, for 'every man did that which was right in his own eyes.'", because "there is nothing more humiliating and degrading for a person than being under the brute-force government". [10]

The Or HaGanuz community of Northern Israel is based on the principles of Yehudah Ashlag, and is led by Rabbi Mordechai Sheinberger, a prominent contemporary teacher of Ashlag's kabbalistic system.

Ashlag's sons

Baruch Ashlag (1906–1991)

Shlomo Benyamin Ashlag

Ya'akov (Jacob) Ashlag

See also

Ashlag (Hasidic dynasty)

References

Odenheimer, Micha (December 16, 2004). "Latter-day luminary (continued)". Haaretz. Archived from the original on 2007-10-01. Retrieved 2006-10-16.

Ashlag, Yehuda (1988) [1943]. תלמוד עשר הספירות, Talmud Eser ha-sefirot (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yeshivat "Kol Yehudah" le-limude ha-niglah ve-ha-nistar. LCCN 2006551803.

Canright, Collin; Ph.D, Rav Michael Laitman (2007-06-05). The Complete Idiot's Guide to Kabbalah: Make Your Life's Path a Spiritual One. Penguin. pp. 10–11. ISBN 978-1-4406-9682-4.

Micha Odenheimer: Latter-day luminary: Part 2. Haaretz , December 16, 2004,

Ashlag, Y. "Speech in Celebration for the Conclusion of the Zohar." Bnei Baruch Kabbalah Education and Research Institute. Trans., C. Ratz, available at [1] Archived 2005-11-09 at the Wayback Machine. Published in original Hebrew as Maamar LeSium HaZohar in Kabbalah LaMathil. 2002. Israel: Bnei Baruch, pp. 28—36.

Ashlag, Yehuda (1980) [1932?]. "Mahut Hochmat Hakabbala - Essence of the Wisdom of Kabbalah (Translation)". ספר מתן תורה, Sefer Matan Torah (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Ohr HaGanuz. ISBN 0-943688-30-2. LCCN 96827232. Archived from the original on 2005-11-04. Retrieved 2005-10-20.

Ashlag, Yehudah; Berg, Philip S. (1994). A study of the ten luminous emanations : the wisdom of the Kabbalah. New York: Research Centre of Kabbalah. ISBN 0-924457-91-0. OCLC 37976882.

Ashlag, Yehuda (1980) [1932?]. ספר מתן תורה [Sefer Matan Torah] (in Hebrew). Jerusalem: Ohr HaGanuz. LCCN 96827232.

Ashlag, Yehuda (1974). Entrance to the zohar. Kabbalah Learning Center. ISBN 0-943688-04-3. OCLC 948750285.

"Building the Future Society". Archived from the original on 2007-10-17. Retrieved 2006-12-10.

External links

Wikiquote has quotations related to Yehuda Ashlag.

Ashlag.org - grandson of Yehuda Archived 2006-02-26 at the Wayback Machine

Jonatan Meir, "The Beginnings of Kabbalah in America: The Unpublished Manuscripts of R. Levi Isaac Krakovsky", Aries: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism 13, 2 (2013), pp. 237–268

Baal HaSulam Melodies (playlist) published by Kabbalah La'am Music on SoundCloud

vte

Acharonim

16th century

Bezalel AshkenaziMoses ben Jacob CordoveroJoshua FalkMoshe IsserlesYosef KaroJudah Loew ben BezalelMordecai YoffeMeir LublinIsaac LuriaSolomon LuriaObadiah ben Jacob SfornoChaim VitalDavid ben Solomon ibn Abi ZimraIsaiah Horowitz

17th century

Samuel Eidels Ḥayyim ShabbethaiMenasseh Ben IsraelMoses Raphael de AguilarMoses ben Isaac Judah LimaShabbatai HaKohenDavid HaLevi SegalAvraham GombinerHillel ben Naphtali ZeviIsaac Aboab da FonsecaHezekiah da SilvaYair BacharachIsaac AbendanaSamuel ben Uri Shraga Phoebus

18th century

Chaim ibn AttarJonathan EybeschützMoshe Chaim LuzzattoZechariah Mendel ben Aryeh Leib of CracowJoseph ben Meir TeomimBaal Shem TovVilna GaonChaim Yosef David AzulaiJacob EmdenYechezkel LandauShalom SharabiShneur Zalman of LiadiElazar FleckelesSimcha Bunim of PeshischaSamuel LoewAryeh Leib HaCohen HellerAvraham DanzigYaakov LorberbaumAkiva Eiger

19th century

Yehudah Aryeh Leib AlterNaftali Zvi Yehuda BerlinAbraham Hirsch ben Jacob Eisenstadt of ByelostokBaruch EpsteinMoshe Mordechai EpsteinYechezkel Michel EpsteinSamson Raphael HirschYisrael Meir KaganYosef Hayyim (Ben Ish Hai)MalbimMenachem Mendel SchneersonMoses SoferChaim SoloveitchikYaakov Dovid WilovskyMeir Simcha of Dvinsk

20th century

Baruch Shalom HaLevi AshlagYehuda AshlagShlomo Zalman AuerbachEliyahu Eliezer DesslerAbraham Isaac KookMordechai EliyahuMoshe FeinsteinYitzchok HutnerAvrohom Yeshaya KarelitzMenachem Mendel SchneersonElazar ShachYaakov Chaim SoferJoseph B. SoloveitchikJoel TeitelbaumEliezer WaldenbergShmuel WosnerOvadia YosefHayim David HaLeviBen Zion Abba ShaulBen-Zion Meir Hai Uziel

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

Categories: [1885 births](#)[1954 deaths](#)[20th-century anarchists](#)[20th-century rabbis](#)[Anarcho-communists](#)[Burials at Har HaMenuhot](#)[Israeli anarchists](#)[Israeli anti-capitalists](#)[Israeli Hasidic rabbis](#)[Jewish mysticism](#)[Kabbalists](#)[Orthodox Jewish anarchists](#)[Polish anarchists](#)[Polish Orthodox rabbis](#)[Hasidic rabbis in Mandatory Palestine](#)[Spiritual teachers](#)

This page was last edited on 29 October 2025, at 00:37 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

[Privacy policy](#)[About Wikipedia](#)[Disclaimers](#)[Contact Wikipedia](#)[Code of Conduct](#)[Developers](#)[Statistics](#)[Cookie statement](#)[Mobile view](#)

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

WikipediaThe Free Encyclopedia

Donate

Create account

Log in

Moses ben Jacob Cordovero

Article

Talk

Read

Edit

View history

Tools

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

For the 17th-century physician, see Moses Cordovero.

Moses ben Jacob Cordovero

משה קורדוביר

Cordovero's grave in Safed

Personal life

Born 1522

Died 1570 (aged 47–48)

Safed, Damascus Eyalet, Ottoman Empire

Nationality Ottoman Jew

Spouse Sister of Solomon Alkabetz

Children Gedaliah

Notable work(s)

Pardes Rimonim

Or Yāqār

Tomer Devorah

Ohr Neerav

Elimah Rabbati

Sefer Gerushin

Occupation Rabbi, Kabbalist

Religious life

Religion Judaism

Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (Hebrew: משה קורדוביר Moshe Kordovero; 1522–1570) was a central figure in the historical development of Kabbalah, leader of a mystical school in the Ottoman Empire in 16th-century Safed, located in

the modern State of Israel. He is known by the acronym Ramak (רמ"ק).

After the medieval flourishing of Kabbalah, centered on the Zohar, attempts were made to give a complete intellectual system to its theology, such as by Meir ben Ezekiel ibn Gabbai. Influenced by the earlier success of Jewish philosophy in articulating a rational study of Jewish thought, Cordovero produced the first full integration of the previous differing schools in Kabbalistic interpretation. While he was a mystic inspired by the opaque imagery of the Zohar, Cordoverian Kabbalah utilised the conceptual framework of emanating cause and effect from the Infinite to the Finite in systemising Kabbalah, the method of philosophical style discourse he held most effective in describing a process that reflects sequential logic and coherence.[1] His encyclopedic works became a central stage in the development of Kabbalah.[2]

Immediately after him in Safed, Isaac Luria articulated a subsequent system of Kabbalistic theology, with new supra-rational doctrines recasting previous Kabbalistic thought. While Lurianism displaced the Cordoverian scheme and became predominant in Judaism, its followers read Cordoverian works in harmony with their teachings. Where, to them, Lurianism described the "World" of Rectification, Cordovero described the pre-Rectification World.[3] Both articulations of the 16th-century mystical Renaissance in Safed gave Kabbalah an intellectual prominence to rival medieval Jewish rationalism, whose social influence on Judaism had waned after the expulsion of Jews from Spain.

Biography

Part of a series on

Kabbalah

Kabbalistic Tree of Life

Concepts

History

Practices

People

Role

vte

Early life

The name Cordovero indicates that his family originated in Córdoba, Spain, and perhaps fled from there during the expulsion of 1492 ensuing from the Spanish Inquisition. His Hebrew signature, however (Cordoeiro), strongly suggests a long-lasting residence in Portugal.

Moses was either born in or moved to Safed in the Land of Israel, the city that was soon to become famed as a center of Kabbalah and mystical creativity. Although not involved in mystical studies until his twentieth year, he soon gained a reputation as an extraordinary genius and a prolific writer. Besides his knowledge in Kabbalah, he was a Talmudic scholar and a man of commanding mastery in Jewish philosophy who was respected in these fields. Contrary to popular belief, however, he was not one of the rabbis who received the special semikhah ('ordination') from Jacob Berab in 1538, alongside Joseph Karo, Cordovero's teacher of Halakha, Moses ben Joseph di Trani, Yosef Sagis, and Moshe Alshich. As a whole, Cordovero's contributions to posterity were in speculative and performative Kabbalah; however, during his lifetime, he was the renowned head of the yeshiva for Portuguese immigrants in Safed.

Scholarship

According to his testimony in the introduction to *Pardes Rimonim* (Orchard of Pomegranates), in 1542, at the age of twenty, Moses heard a "heavenly voice" urging him to study Kabbalah with his brother-in-law, Shlomo Alkabetz, composer of the mystical song "Lecha Dodi". He was thus initiated into the mysteries of the Zohar. The young Moses not only mastered the text

but also decided to organize the kabbalistic themes leading to his day and present them in an organized fashion. This led to the composition of his first book, *Pardes Rimonim*, which was completed in 1548 and secured his reputation as a brilliant kabbalist and a lucid thinker. The *Pardes*, as it is known, was a systematization of kabbalistic thought up to that time and featured the author's attempt at reconciling early schools with the conceptual teachings of the *Zohar* to demonstrate an essential unity and self-consistent philosophical basis of Kabbalah.[4]

His second work, a magnum opus entitled *Precious Light* (אור יקר, *Or Yāqār*), was a 16-volume commentary on the *Zoharic* literature in its entirety and a work to which the Ramak had devoted most of his life. Some other books for which he is known are the *Tomer Devorah* (Palm Tree of Deborah), in which he utilizes the kabbalistic concepts of the *sefirot* to illuminate a system of morals and ethics; *Ohr Neerav*, a justification of and insistence upon the importance of Kabbalah study and an introduction to the methods explicated in *Pardes Rimonim*;^[5] *Elimah Rabbati*, a highly abstract treatise on kabbalistic concerns revolving around the Godhead and its relationship to the *sefirot*; and the *Sefer Gerushin*, a short and intimate composition which features the highly devotional slant of Cordovero, as well as his asceticism and religious piety. Certain parts of Cordovero's works are still manuscripts, whereas his existing writings suggest that he had many other compositions that he either intended to write or had written, but which were lost.

Disciples

Around 1550, he founded a Kabbalah academy in Safed in the Damascus Eyalet of Ottoman Palestine, which he led for approximately twenty years until his death. He is buried in the Old Cemetery of Safed. His disciples included Eliyahu de Vidas, author of the *Reshit Chochmah* (Beginning of Wisdom), and Chaim Vital, who later became the official recorder and disseminator of the teachings of Isaac Luria.

Cordovero was survived by a wife, the sister of Solomon Alkabetz, whose

name remains unknown, and by his son Gedaliah (1562–1625). Gedaliah was the impetus behind the publication of some of Cordovero's books in Venice between 1584 and 1587. Gedaliah was buried in Jerusalem in the Damascus Eyalet, where he had spent most of his adult life after returning from Venice.

Succession of Kabbalistic interpretation after the Ramak

According to tradition, Isaac Luria (known by the acronym "Ari" or "Arizal") arrived in Safed on the exact day of the funeral of Moshe Cordovero in 1570. When he joined in the funeral procession, he realised that only he saw a pillar of fire following the Ramak's presence.[6] The Zohar describes this spiritual revelation as a sign to the individual who sees it, that he is meant to inherit the succession of leadership from the departed person. However, as Luria had been instructed to find his chosen disciple in Safed, Haim Vital, to reveal his new teachings to, he avoided accepting Kabbalistic leadership until six months later, when Rabbi Haim Vital approached him. The Ari only lived for two years after this, until 1572, but in those few months he revolutionised the conceptual system of Kabbalah, with his new doctrines and philosophical system.

The two schools of Cordoveran and Lurianic Kabbalah give two alternative accounts and synthesis of the complete theology of Kabbalah until then, based on their interpretation of the Zohar. After the public dissemination of the Zohar in medieval times, various attempts were made to give a complete intellectual system of theology to its different schools and interpretations. Influenced by the earlier rational success of Jewish philosophy, especially the work of Maimonides, in producing a systematic intellectual articulation of Judaism, the Ramak achieved the first accepted systemisation of Kabbalah, based on its rational categorisation and study. Subsequent followers of the Ari saw their teachings as harmonious with, and a deeper interpretation of the Zohar and the Ramak's system, but the new system of Isaac Luria revealed completely new doctrines, as well as new descriptions of the earlier ideas of Kabbalah. In time, Lurianic Kabbalah emerged as the dominant system; however, the works of the Ramak are still highly esteemed and widely studied, as well.

Among the Ramak's most visible books

Pardes Rimonim ("An Orchard of Pomegranates") — Ramak's first book, an encyclopedic synthesis of the main trends of kabbalistic thought with numerous diagrams,[7] which secured his reputation as a mystical genius.

Ohr Yakar ("A Precious Light") — a magnum opus of some 16 volumes in its extant manuscript form, which had occupied Ramak throughout his adult life - a classic commentary on the Zohar, Sefer Yetzirah and the Zoharic literary offshoots. Its publication ended around 2005 in Jerusalem (some 22 volumes). Certain parts, such as Tefilah le-Moshe and Shiur Qomah, were previously published as separate works.[8]

Tomer Devorah ("The Palm Tree of Deborah") — a popular work of Musar literature based on kabbalistic principles. It has been translated into English by Louis Jacobs (1960)[9] and by Rabbi Moshe Miller (1993).[10] The first chapter was translated with an extensive commentary by Henry Abramson (2014).[11]

Eilima Rabbati — of which two-thirds is still unpublished.[12]

Or Ne'erav ("A Pleasant Light," or perhaps "A Mixed Light" or "A Darkened Light") — An annotated English edition was produced by Ira Robinson (1994).

Sefer Gerushin ("The Book of Banishments") — A disclosure of Ramak's fellowship and their devotional piety in the Galilean outskirts of Safed. A highly informative text concerning Ramak's devotional piety and the use of landscape as the negotiator between heaven and earth.

Notes

The Development of Kabbalistic Thought: Evolution (Hishtalshelut) and the Kabbalah of the Ramak www.inner.org

The Development of Kabbalah in Three Stages www.inner.org

The Jewish Religion: A Companion, Louis Jacobs, Oxford. Entries on Moshe Cordovero and Isaac Luria

Cordovero, M., "Pardes Rimonim", Parts 1-4, trans., Getz, E., Providence University, 2007, p·ix

Cordovero, M., "Or Ne'erav", in Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kabbalah: An Annotated Version of his "Or Ne'erav", trans. Robinson, I., Michael Scharf: Yeshiva University Press, 1994

[1] Article: "The Development of Kabbalah in Three Stages" Section: "The Historical Evolution of Kabbalistic Thought" from www.inner.org

Eugene D. Matanky, "Illustration, Dissemination, and Production: Diagrams in Moses Cordovero's Pardes Rimonim," Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts 51 (2022): 7–38

Today, a manuscript of Ohr Yakar is held at the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York: MS. no. 1767, copied (along with other kabbalistic works) by the Yemenite scribe Yihye Bashiri sometime before 1630.

The Palm Tree of Deborah. Translated by Louis Jacobs. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press. 1960. ISBN 0853030766.

The Palm Tree of Devorah. Translated by Moshe Miller. Targum Press. 1994.

Henry Abramson (2014). The Kabbalah of Forgiveness: The Thirteen Levels of Mercy in Rabbi Moshe Cordovero's Date Palm of Devorah.[self-published source]

"Ramak's Works - Advocate of Kabbala learning". www.chabad.org. Retrieved 2025-06-30.

External links

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero

Tomer Devorah (The Palm Tree of Deborah) - Cordovero's classic text

Moses Cordovero's Meditations for the Ten Days of Repentance

The Ramak

Jewish Encyclopedia article

"The Unity of God" - from The Garden of Pomegranates

Video Lecture on Rabbi Moshe Cordevero by Henry Abramson of Touro College South

Translation of First Chapter of Tomer Devorah excepted from Henry Abramson's The Kabbalah of Forgiveness.

Authority control databases [Edit this at Wikidata](#)

vte

Acharonim

16th century

Bezalel AshkenaziMoses ben Jacob CordoveroJoshua FalkMoshe IsserlesYosef KaroJudah Loew ben BezalelMordecai YoffeMeir LublinIsaac LuriaSolomon LuriaObadiah ben Jacob SfornoChaim VitalDavid ben Solomon ibn Abi ZimraIsaiah Horowitz

17th century

Samuel Eidels Ḥayyim ShabbethaiMenasseh Ben IsraelMoses Raphael de AguilarMoses ben Isaac Judah LimaShabbatai HaKohenDavid HaLevi SegalAvraham GombinerHillel ben Naphtali ZeviIsaac Aboab da FonsecaHezekiah da SilvaYair BacharachIsaac AbendanaSamuel ben Uri Shraga Phoebus

18th century

Chaim ibn AttarJonathan EybeschützMoshe Chaim LuzzattoZechariah Mendel ben Aryeh Leib of CracowJoseph ben Meir TeomimBaal Shem TovVilna GaonChaim Yosef David AzulaiJacob EmdenYechezkel LandauShalom SharabiShneur Zalman of LiadiElazar FleckelesSimcha Bunim of PeshischaSamuel LoewAryeh Leib HaCohen HellerAvraham DanzigYaakov LorberbaumAkiva Eiger

19th century

Yehudah Aryeh Leib AlterNaftali Zvi Yehuda BerlinAbraham Hirsch ben Jacob Eisenstadt of ByelostokBaruch EpsteinMoshe Mordechai EpsteinYechiel Michel EpsteinSamson Raphael HirschYisrael Meir KaganYosef Hayyim (Ben Ish Ḥai)MalbimMenachem Mendel SchneersohnMoses SoferChaim SoloveitchikYaakov Dovid WilovskyMeir Simcha of Dvinsk

20th century

**Baruch Shalom HaLevi AshlagYehuda AshlagShlomo Zalman
AuerbachEliyahu Eliezer DesslerAbraham Isaac KookMordechai
EliyahuMoshe FeinsteinYitzchok HutnerAvrohom Yeshaya
KarelitzMenachem Mendel SchneersonElazar ShachYaakov Chaim
SoferJoseph B. SoloveitchikJoel TeitelbaumEliezer WaldenbergShmuel
WosnerOvadia YosefHayim David HaLeviBen Zion Abba ShaulBen-Zion Meir
Hai Uziel**

**Categories: 1522 births1570 deathsRabbis from Córdoba, Spain16th-century
rabbis from the Ottoman EmpireRabbis in Ottoman GalileeKabbalistsRabbis
in SafedSephardi rabbis from Ottoman PalestineAuthors of Kabbalistic
worksBurials at the Old Jewish Cemetery, SafedHebrew-language writers**

This page was last edited on 24 October 2025, at 22:27 (UTC).

**Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0
License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the
Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of
the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.**

**Privacy policyAbout WikipediaDisclaimersContact WikipediaCode of
ConductDevelopersStatisticsCookie statementMobile view**

Wikimedia Foundation

Powered by MediaWiki

THE HYMN OF THE PEARL

Introduction

Deeply embedded in the lore of every culture is the theme of the hero who sets out on a quest, encounters dangers of every kind and at last brings home a treasure. The idea that there is something precious to be found, something that man essentially needs and which itself reciprocally needs to be recovered, is as old as man himself. There is no tradition, no religion, that has not fished for it in the cauldron of myth and molded it to its purposes. The Sumerians used it in Gilgamesh, you can find it in the pages of the Hindu Mahābhārata and endlessly repeated among the ancient Greeks and Norsemen. It is not surprising, therefore, to come upon it in the Gnostic canon, in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostle Thomas. Sometimes entitled the "Hymn of the Robe of Glory," sometimes the "Hymn of the Soul," and again the "Song of the Apostle Judas Thomas in the Land of the Indians," it is here more accurately called the "Hymn of the Pearl," for it is the Biblical pearl of great price that the hero is sent to retrieve. And where is this treasure to be found? Where else but in the domain of the serpent, the world-encircling Ouroboros that dwells in the waters of darkness.

So he sets forth, the Prince of the East, leaving father, mother and elder brother, in one sense provisioned for the journey but in another naked. For they strip him of his "robe of glory," while promising that he shall have it back when he has achieved the quest. This gesture is essential to the story. Hero or savior, whichever he be—and here in the Hymn he is,

perhaps, both—must go to his tryst defenseless. To be equipped against danger would be to prevent danger from fostering the rescuing power.

Forth he goes into Egypt, settles himself beside the serpent, puts on the garments of the Egyptians and tastes their food and drink. This, of course, as it was with Persephone in Hades, is his undoing, but the myth, for his very herohood, requires that he be undone. So, having eaten, he falls asleep, forgets the Pearl and no longer recognizes himself as a son of the King of the East. But as in the fairy tales, where the dwarf, the frog or the little old woman come to the prince's assistance, so in myth do divine powers come to the aid of the hero. A letter, sent from another level, that of father, mother and brother, flies to him in the form of an eagle, which when it meets him, becomes speech. He wakes and remembers who he is and in doing so remembers the Pearl. Now, with the spell of his father's name, he, in turn, puts the serpent to sleep, seizes the necessary treasure, throws off the garments of the Egyptians and retraces his steps toward his homeland. At this point, because he has found the Pearl, his robe of glory comes to meet him and he hastens to receive it. Thus clothed, and bringing with him his finding, he can return to his father's kingdom, renewed—one could even say reborn—and the fateful quest achieved.

So the hymn is sung and the story ended. But for us the end becomes a beginning. For, faced with this fundamental theme, we ponder on its meaning and search for it in ourselves. Who is the hero? From whence does he come? What does Egypt signify; what the serpent; what the Pearl? Are we being told that a son of Heaven, putting off his starry accoutrements, descends into the world of matter and retrieves from uncomprehending darkness the fallen seed of light? Or is the Pearl rather the lapsed soul that the celestials need to reclaim?

These are questions, not assertions. Symbols, by their nature, are multisided; they cast their light in all directions and are capable of endless interpretations. Anyone reading the Hymn of the Pearl will find his own meaning in it. And it may be that light will be thrown on the story by its Biblical redaction in the parable of the Prodigal Son. He, too, went away from his father's house, descended into his own kind of Egypt and there symbolically fell asleep. But at length, he, too, like the hero of the Pearl,

The Hymn of the Pearl

awoke. "He came to himself," St. Luke tells us, and by means of that recovered self, bearing it with him as a treasure, he arose and returned to his father.

Thus, in one way or another, in hymn, parable, fairy tale, myth, the theme of search repeats itself. Setting out and coming home—these are the heart of the matter. Without the first the second is not possible. The quest is not merely a personal but a cosmic process. The hero, in discovering himself, renews the general life—of man and of the world.

P. L. Travers

da-yhūdā t'ōmā šlîhā
d-ba-trā d-hendawāyē.

of Judas-Thomas the Apostle
in the Country of the Indians.

1. *had enā šbar yallād,
w-āmar b-malkūt(y), bêt āb(y),*

1. When I was young, a child still,
dwelling in my kingdom, in my
Father's house,

2. *wa-b-ūtrā wa-b-ge'wtā
da-mrabbyānay mnāh (h)wēt,*

2. and enjoying the wealth
and the splendour of my foster-
ers,

3. *menn madenḥā, mātan,
zawwed(w) 'bāhay, šaddrūn(y),*

3. my parents, having supplied me
with food,
sent me forth from the East,
our home.

4. *w-menn 'utrā d-bêt gazzan
kbar šammed(w) lî mawblā,*

4. From the wealth of our treasure-
house
they had, long before, bundled
for me a load,

5. *saggi'ā (h)y w-ḥallilā,
d-enā l-ḥoday eškliḥ,*

5. large and (yet) light,
which I might carry myself
alone:

6. *dahbā (h)y d-bêt gellāyē
w-si'mā d-gazzak rabbtā.*

6. Gold from the country of the
Geleans,
silver from the Great Ganzak,

7. *w-ḥarkednē menn hendū
wa ptawtkē d-bêt ḥušan,*

7. chalcedonies from India
and topazes from (the land of)
Kushān.

8. *w-ḥazzekun(y) b-'ādāmōs
da-l-parzelā (h)w šāḥek.*

8. They armed me (even) with
diamond
that cuts the iron.

²⁶ The Syriac text of the only manuscript is reproduced in P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum III*, (Paris-Leipzig 1892) 110-115. Critical editions are made by G. Hoffmann, "Zwei Hymnen der Thomasakten", in: *ZNW* 4 (1903) 273-309; and Erwin Preuschen, *Zwei gnostische Hymnen* (Giessen 1904). A handy reproduction (in Estrangela script) has been edited by T. Jansma, *A Selection from the Acts of Judas Thomas*, ([Sem.Stud.Series 1] Leiden 1952). The Greek text may be found in M. Bonnet (ed.), *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, II (reprint Hildesheim 1972), p. 219-224. Our transcription generally follows the text of G. Hoffmann, with a few exceptions. Valuable hints regarding the transcription of the Syriac I owe to my venerated teacher R. Köbert (Rome).

9. *w-^aašelhûn(y) la-zhîtâ*
da-b-ḥubbhôn 'abdûh lî,
 10. *wa-l-tôg(y) da-zḥorîlâ*
d-^aal ḥawmat(y) mmaššah, zḥîr.
 11. *wa-^abad(w) ^aamm(y) ḥûrkânâ*
w-katbû (h)w b-lebb(y) d-lâ neṭfê,
 12. *d-^aen teḥḥôt l-gaw mešrên,*
w-taytyâh l-margnîtâ ḥdâ,
 13. *hây d-^aîlêh b-gaw yammâ*
ḥdāraw(hy) d-ḥewyâ sāyḥâ,
 14. *telebšîh la-zhîtâk,*
wa-l-tôgâk da-^aleh mnâh,
 15. *w-^aamm aḥûk, trayānan,*
yārôt(y) b-malkûtān th(w)ê."
 16. *šegret mad(n)ḥâ, neḥtet,*
ḥad ^aamm(y) trên parwānḥîn,
 17. *d-^aûrhâ dhîlâ w-^alâ,*
w-^aenâ šbar 'nâ l-merdyâh.
 18. *'ebret thûmay mayšân,*
šôb taggāray mad(n)ḥâ,
 19. *wa-mîlêt l-^aara' bābel*
w-^aellet b-šûreh d-sarbûg.
 20. *neḥtet lî l-gaw mešrên*
wa-mlawyānay menn(y) preš(w).
 21. *teršet lwāteh d-ḥewyâ,*
ḥdāraw(hy) d-^ašpazeh šrêt,
 22. *'ad nenûm w-^aad neškab*
w-menneh l-margnît(y) ešklîh.
 23. *wa-d-ḥad (h)wêl, mšawḥad (h)wêl,*
la-bnay 'špāz(y) nukrây (h)wêl.
9. But they let me put off my
glorious Robe
which they had made for me in
their love.
 10. and my purple Toga
that was woven to fit my stature.
 11. And they made with me this
agreement,
writing it into my heart that it
might not be forgotten:
 12. "If you descend into Egypt
and bring (from there) the one
pearl
 13. which is in the midst of the sea,
near the Serpent, the hissing one,
 14. (then) you may don your glo-
rious Robe (again)
and the Toga that covers it,
 15. and together with your brother,
our Second one,
be my heir in our kingdom."
 16. (Thus) I left the East and
descended.
With me there were two messen-
gers,
 17. because the road was dangerous
and difficult,
and I was too young to travel
it (alone).
 18. I passed the district of Mayshân:
the meeting-place of the oriental
merchants,
 19. I reached the land of Babel
and entered the walls of the
Maze.
 20. When I (finally) descended into
the midst of Egypt,
my companions departed from
me.
 21. I went straight to the place of
the Serpent
and settled down near his lod-
ging,
 22. in order to take the pearl from
him
when he would rest and sleep.
 23. As I was only one and quite
alone,
the people of my lodging con-
sidered me a foreigner.

24. *wa-l-bar gens(y), bar he're,*
menn mad(n)hā tammān hzēt,
25. *l-ṭalyā pa'yā, ḥsidā,*
26. *bar mšāḥē, w-lī 'tā, nḥep,*
27. *wa-'badleh bar 'enyān(y),*
w-ḥabrá d-te'gáwt(y) šawpet.
28. *zakhran(y) menn mešrāyē*
w-menn neḥphōn da-msayybē....
29. *wa-'nā lbūšhon lebšet,*
d-lā nšakkrunān(y) d-'etēt ()
30. *d-'essbīh l-margānītā*
wa-n'irūn l-ḥewyā 'lay.
31. *w-ba-'yā menn 'ellālā*
rgeš(w) d-lā (h)wēt bar māthōn
32. *wa-ḥlaṭ(w) 'amm(y) b-neklayhōn*
āp aḥ mūn(y) me'kūlhōn.
33. *wa-'fēt d-bar malkā 'nā,*
w-peḥhet l-malkā dīlhōn.
34. *wa-'fētāh l-margnītā,*
da-'leh 'bāhay šaddrun(y).
35. *b-yūḳrā da-ṭrōpayhōn*
šekbet b-šentā 'mīktā.
36. *wa-b-kull hālēn d-gadšān(y)*
abāhay rgeš(w) w-ḥašš(w) 'lay,
37. *w-'etekrez b-malkūtān,*
d-kull nāš l-tar'an nešgar,
38. *malkē w-rēšay partaw,*
w-kull ra(w)rbānay mad(n)hā.
39. *ḥar(w) 'lay āparsānā,*
da-b-mešrēn lā eštbeḥ,
40. *wa-ktab(w) lī eggartā,*
w-kull rabb šmeh bāh armī:
41. *"menn abūk, mlek malkē,*
w-'emmāk 'ḥīdat mad(n)hā,

24. (But) there I met a fellow of my
race,
a nobleman from the East,
25. a youth, handsome and lovable,
one of the anointed.
26. He came to me and joined me,
27. and I made him my associate,
a companion to whom I confided
my enterprise.
28. He warned me (?) against the
Egyptians
and against their contaminating
intercourse ...
29. (But) I put on their clothes,
not to let them suspect that I
had come ()
30. to take the pearl, (lest) they might
awaken the Serpent against me.
31. But by some reason or other
they found out that I was not
their countryman.
32. They used on me their tricks
and even made me eat from their
food.
33. I then forgot that I was a king's
son,
and I served their king.
34. I forgot about the pearl, too,
for which my parents had sent
me out,
35. and (overwhelmed) by their he-
avy dishes
I fell into a deep sleep.
36. All these mishaps of mine
my parents noticed and felt con-
cerned for me.
37. It was proclaimed in our kingdom
that every man should come to
our court,
38. all the knights and princes of
Parthia
and all the grandees of the East.
39. They passed on me a resolution
that I should not be left in Egypt.
40. They wrote a letter to me,
and every magnate signed it
with his name:
41. "From your Father, the King of
kings,
from your Mother, the ruler of
the East

42. *w-menn aḥūk, trayānan,*
lāh, bran, da-b-mešrēn: šlām!
43. *nūd, ḥūm lāh menn šentāk*
w-mellē d-'eggartān šma'!
44. *et'ahd d-bar malkē att!*
ḥzī 'abdūtā, l-man plaḥt!
45. *'ahdēh l-margānītā,*
da-'lēh l-mešrēn ešgart!
46. *etdakraḥ la-zhītāh*
wa-l-ṭōgāk ga'yā 'had!
47. *d-telbaš(y) wa-d-tešabbat,*
d-ba-spar ḥlīšē šmāk 'ṭkrī,
48. *w-'amm aḥūk, pašgrīban,*
yāret b-malkūtān th(w)ē!"
49. *w-'eggartā eggartā(h)y*
d-malkā b-yamīneh ḥtam,
50. *menn bišē, bnay bābel,*
w-daywē mrīrē d-sarbug.
51. *perḥat ba-dmūt nešrā*
malkā d-kull pāraḥtā,
52. *perḥat w-šeknat šēday*
w-kullāh (h)wāt lāh mellā.
53. *l-ḥālāh wa-l-ḥāl regšāh*
neddet w-ḥāmet menn šent(y).
54. *šḥaltāh lī wa-nšaktāh*
wa-šrēt 'nā l-ḥātmāh, ḥrēt,
55. *w-kull a(y)ḥ da-b-lebb(y)ršīm*
(h)wā,
mellēh d-'eggart(y) etkteb.
56. *'ehdet d-bar malkē 'nā,*
w-ḥérūt(y) kyānāh pākḏā.
57. *'ehdet l-margānītā,*
da-'leh l-mešrēn 'šadret.

42. and from your Brother, our
Second one,
greetings to you, our son in
Egypt!
43. Awake, rise from your sleep,
and listen to the words of our
letter!
44. Remember that you are a son of
kings,
consider the slavery, and whom
you are serving!
45. Remember the pearl
for which you set out to Egypt!
46. Think of the glorious Robe
and your splendid Toga remem-
ber,
47. which you are to wear and to
adorn yourself with
as your name is mentioned in the
book of Heroes,
48. and together with your Brother,
our grand vizier
you shall be heir of our king-
dom!"
49. My letter was one which the
King
seals by his own right hand,
50. against the wicked ones, the sons
of Babel,
and the fierce demons of the
Maze.
51. It flew like an eagle,
the king of all birds,
52. it flew and alighted at my side,
and all of it became word (and
speech).
53. By its voice, by the sound of its
whisper,
I awoke and rose from my sleep.
54. I took (the letter) and kissed it,
I broke its seal, and read,
55. and all its words were written
just as they had been inscribed
in my heart.
56. I (now) remembered that I was
a son of kings,
and my nobility obliged (me to
follow) my nature.
57. I remembered the pearl,
for which I had been sent to
Egypt.

58. *w-šarrīt mmaggeš 'nā leh,*
l-ḥewyā dḥilā w-sāyḫā,
59. *anīmtēh w-'aškebteh*
d-šem āb(y) 'law(hy) eldakret,
60. [*wa-šmeh da-trayānan*
wa-d-'emm(y), malkat mad(n)ḥā].
61. *wa-ḥṭaptāh l-margnītā*
w-'eṭpet d-'epnē b-bēt āb(y).
62. *lbūšḥōn šā'ā w-ṭam'ā*
šelhet, šbaḫteh b-'a(t)rhōn.
63. *traštāh l-mardīt(y) d-'ēlē*
l-nūhrā d-mātan, mad(n)ḥā.
64. *wa-l-'eggart(y), m'iranīt(y),*
ḫdāmāy b-'ūrḥā eškhet.
65. *w-'a(y)k b-ḫālāh a'irtan(y),*
tūb b-nūhrāh lī mdabbrā.
66. *da-šrāgā bāslikōn*
ḫdāmāy b-ḥawreh mapreg.
67. *wa-b-ḫālāh wa-b-hedyāh*
tūbān rhībūt(y) mlabbā,
68. *wa-b-ḥubbāh nāgdā lī.*
69. *nepḫet, 'bartāh l-sarbatg,*
šebḫet l-bābel l-semāl(y),
70. *wa-mīēt l-mayšān rabbtā,*
la-lme'nhōn d-taggārē,
71. *d-ba-'bar d-yammā yāteb.*
72. *wa-l-zahyūt(y) d-šelhet (h)wēt*
wa-l-tōgā d-bāh m'aṭṭep,
73. *menn rāmātā d-wirḫān*
l-tammān ābay šaddrūh,
74. *b-'iddā d-gizzabrayhōn,*
d-ba-šrārḥōn 'lēh mhaymnīn.

58. Thus I started to charm
the terrible Serpent, the hissing
one.
59. I made him drowsy, I caused him
to sleep,
as I mentioned over him my
Father's name
60. [and the name of our Second one
and that of my Mother, the
queen of the East].
61. I then snatched the pearl
and started to return to my
Father's house.
62. Their filthy, unclean clothes I
put off
and left them at their (owners')
place,
63. and straight I took my way
to our lightful home, the East.
64. And my letter that had awakened
me
I found preceding me on the way.
65. As it had awakened me with its
voice,
so again with its light it led me
66. as an imperial beacon (?)
shining before me with its
brightness.
67. By its voice and its guidance,
again and again,
it urged me to speed on,
68. by its love it drew me ahead.
69. I set out and by-passed the
Maze,
leaving Babel on my left side,
70. until I came to the Great May-
shān,
the merchants' market place,
71. that dwells on the seashore.
72. There my parents had sent (in
advance)
my splendid Robe which I had
shed,
73. and the Toga which covers it,
from the heights of Hyrkania
74. by the hands of their treasurers,
who for
their faithfulness were entrusted
with it.

75. *d-lā 'āhed (h)wēt tegmāh,*
d-šabrūt(y) šbaḫtāh bēt āb(y).
76. *menn šel(y) kad aḫbeltāh*
l-maḫzīt(y) lbūštā d-māt lī.
77. *kullāh enā b-kull(y) ḫzēt*
w-'āp 'nā l-kull(y) bāh aḫblet.
78. *da-trēn (h)nan b-pūršānā*
w-ḥad tūb (h)nan ba-ḫdā d-mā.
79. *w-'āp lhōn 'nā, l-gizzabrē,*
d-lī aytyūh ḥākan, ḫzēt,
80. *da-trēn 'nōn ḫdā d-mā 'nōn,*
d-ḥad nīš malkā ršim bhōn,
81. *b-'ideh d-'āb(y) d-pannī lī*
l-gū'lān(y) w-'ūtr(y) b-'idayhōn,
82. *la-zhītā mšabbattā*
da-b-gawnē ga'yā mšabb'ā.
83. *b-dahbā wa-b-berullē*
w-ḫarkednē wa-ṭawḫē
84. *w-sardukḫē prišāt gōn*
āp hī krōmāh matḫnā.
85. *wa-b-ke'pē d-'ādāmōs*
kull šāryātāh mḫabb'ān.
86. *w-šalmeh da-mlek malkē*
kull b-kullāh massāk w-šir.
87. *w-'a(y)k ke'pā d-sappilā*
tūbān krōmēh mpatḫā.
88. *wa-ḫzēt tūb da-b-kullāh*
zāw'ay ydā'tā rāptīn.
89. *w-'a(y)k hī d-la-mmallālā*
tūb ḫzītāh d-mel'attdā.
90. *ḫāl ne'mātāh šem'et,*
d-'amm maḫḫtānāh mrattmā

75. Though I did not remember its
rank (and dignity),
having left it in my childhood
at my Father's house,
76. yet suddenly when I faced the
vestment (again),
I felt as if seeing myself in a
mirror, so closely it resembled me
77. I saw the whole of it (reflected)
in the whole of me,
and again, all of me I faced in it.
78. We were two by clear distinction,
and yet one by identical form.
79. The treasurers, too, who brought
it
to me, I saw in the same way,
80. that, though being two, they
were of the same form,
for one and the same kingly
character was stamped on them
81. by the hand of my Father who
through them
returned to me my deposit, my
precious wealth,
82. the glorious Robe, decorated,
bright and colourful
83. with gold and beryls,
chalcedonies and topazes,
84. with sardonyses of various hues,
yet its colouring was constant.
85. With diamond stones
all its seams were fastened
86. and the full image of the King
of kings
was depicted all over it in em-
broidery,
87. and variegated like the sapphire
stone
was again the colouring of this,
too.
88. Besides, I noticed that from the
emotion
of recognizing me it trembled in
all its parts,
89. and I saw how it tried
as if wanting to speak,
90. I heard whispering the voice of
its songs
while it descended (on me):

91. *d-“hānaw da-zrīz ‘bādā,*
d-leh rabbyān(y) ḥdāmaw(hy)
d-‘āb(y).
92. *w-‘āp ‘nā margšā (h)wēt bī,*
d-ḥawmt(y) a(y)k ‘amlaw(hy)
rābyā.”
93. *wa-b-zāw‘ēh malkāyē*
kullāh lwāt(y) meštapp‘ā,
94. *w-‘al idā d-yāhōbēh*
mestarhbā a(y)k d-‘eškīlīh.
95. *w-‘āp lī ḥubb(y) zāḥet (h)wā*
d-‘erhaṭ l-‘ūr‘āh ‘ḥabbliḥ.
96. *w-‘etpaštet w-ḥabbeltāh*
b-šuprā d-gāwnēh ‘ṣabbtet.
97. *wa-l-ṭōg(y) naṣīḥ gāwnē*
kull(y) b-kulleh et‘aṭtet.
98. *lebšet bāh w-‘et‘allet*
la-tra‘ šlāmā w-segdtā.
99. *ḥeppet rīš(y) w-segdet leh,*
l-zīweh d-‘āb(y), d-lī šaddrāh,
100. *d-‘ebdet (h)wēt l-pūḥdānaw(hy),*
w-‘āp hū d-‘eštawdī ‘bad.
101. *wa-b-tar‘ā d-wāspuraw(hy)*
b-ra(w)rbānaw(hy) etḥalltet.
102. *da-ḥdī bī w-ḥabbel yāt(y)*
w-‘ammeh b-malkūteh (h)wēt.
103. *wa-b-ḥālā da-drūsā*
‘kull pālhaw(hy) lī mšabbhīn,
104. *w-‘eštawdī da-l-tar‘ā ()*
da-mlek malkē () ešgar.
105. *wa-b-ḥūrbān margānīt(y)*
‘ammeh l-malkan et(h)zē.
91. “There he is, the valiant in deeds,
for whom they raised me before
my Father!
92. On myself, too, I noticed
that my stature according to his
actions grew.”
93. And, with kingly vibrations all
over it,
it floated towards me,
94. being excited that I should take
it
from the hands of the donors.
95. I, myself, being overwhelmed
with love,
hurried to meet it and to receive
it.
96. I stretched myself and accepted
it
and adorned myself with the
beauty of its colours.
97. With my Toga, brilliant with
colours,
I covered myself completely.
98. Being clothed with it I was
ushered
into the court of reception and
adoration.
99. I bowed my head and adored
the Glory of my Father who had
sent it to me.
100. I had carried out his command-
ments,
and he, too, had fulfilled what he
promised.
101. I then was admitted
to the court of his knights and
grandeens.
102. He was pleased to welcome me
and let me be together with him
in his kingdom.
103. All his servants
praised me with loud cheers (?).
104. And he promised me that to the
court
of the King of kings I should go,
and in his company should
appear
with the present of my pearl
before the King.

(Asterisks indicate a supposed lacuna.)

(In the Translation, dots indicate that the Syriac text is corrupt
or unintelligible.)

1 בן ארץ זעביל
 2 ונחתי בלתיאבא בן ארץ
 3 כחוראבא כחוראבא
 4 ונחתיאבא בן ארץ
 5 ונחתיאבא בן ארץ
 6 ונחתיאבא בן ארץ
 7 ונחתיאבא בן ארץ

1 When I was a little child,
 2 And dwelling in my kingdom in my Father's house,
 3 And in the wealth and the glories
 4 Of my nurturers had my pleasure,
 5 From the East, our home,
 6 My parents, having equipped me, sent me forth.
 7 And of the wealth of our treasury
 8 They had already tied up for me a load,
 9 Large it was, yet light,
 10 So that I might bear it unaided—
 11 Gold of
 12 And silver of Gazzak the great,
 13 And rubies of India,
 14 And agates (?) from the land of Kūshān (?),

- 8 ܡܠܚܬܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 9 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 10 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 11 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 12 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 13 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 14 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 15 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 16 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ
 ܕܡܠܚܐ ܕܡܠܚܐ

8^a MS ܡܠܚܐ9^a MS ܕܡܠܚܐ12^b MS ܕܡܠܚܐ15^b MS ܕܡܠܚܐ16^a MS ܕܡܠܚܐ

- 8 And they girded me with adamant
 Which can crush iron.
 9 And they took off from me the bright robe,
 Which in their love they had wrought for me,
 10 And my purple toga,
 Which was measured (and) woven to my stature.
 11 And they made a compact with me,
 And wrote it in my heart that it should not be forgotten:
 12 "If thou goest down into Egypt,
 And bringest the one pearl,
 13 Which is in the midst of the sea
 Hard by the loud-breathing serpent,
 14 (Then) shalt thou put on thy bright robe
 And thy toga, which is laid over it,
 15 And with thy Brother, our next in rank,
 Thou shalt be heir in our kingdom."
 16 I quitted the East (and) went down,
 There being with me two messengers,

17 ܠܠܗ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܠܠܗ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 18 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 19 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 20 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 21 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 22 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 23 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 24 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 25 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 * * * ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 * * * ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 26 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 27 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ
 ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ ܕܡܠܟܐ

17 For the way was dangerous and difficult,
 And I was very young to tread it.
 18 I passed the borders of Maishān,
 The meeting-place of the merchants of the East,
 19 And I reached the land of Babel
 And entered the walls of
 20 I went down into Egypt,
 And my companions parted from me.
 21 I betook me straight to the serpent,
 Hard by his dwelling I abode,
 22 (Waiting) till he should slumber and sleep,
 And I could take my pearl from him.
 23 And when I was single and alone,
 A stranger to those with whom I dwelt,
 24 One of my race, a free-born man,
 From among the Easterns, I beheld there—
 25 A youth fair and well favoured
 * * *
 26 * * * *
 * * and he came and attached himself to me.
 27 And I made him my intimate,
 A comrade with whom I shared my merchandise.

28 ܠܝܫܬܝܢ ܐܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 29 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 30 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 31 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 32 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 33 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 34 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 35 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 36 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 37 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ
 38 ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ ܡܕܝܢܝܢ

28 I warned him against the Egyptians
 And against consorting with the unclean;
 29 And I put on a garb like theirs,
 Lest they should insult (?) me because I had come from afar,
 30 To take away the pearl,
 And (lest) they should arouse the serpent against me.
 31 But in some way or other
 They perceived that I was not their countryman;
 32 So they dealt with me treacherously,
 Moreover they gave me their food to eat.
 33 I forgot that I was a son of kings,
 And I served their king;
 34 And I forgot the pearl,
 For which my parents had sent me,
 35 And by reason of the burden of their . . .
 I lay in a deep sleep.
 36 But all these things that befel me
 My parents perceived and were grieved for me;
 37 And a proclamation was made in our kingdom,
 That all should speed to our gate,
 38 Kings and princes of Parthia
 And all the nobles of the East.
 B. H. S.



49 ܐܡ ܠܗܝܠܬܐ ܐܗܝܠܬܐ 49
 ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 50 ܠܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ 50
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 51 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 51
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 52 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 52
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 53 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 53
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 54 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 54
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 55 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 55
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 56 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 56
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 57 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 57
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ
 58 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ 58
 ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ ܠܡܠܟܐ

49 And my letter (was) a letter
 Which the King sealed with his right hand,
 50 (To keep it) from the wicked ones, the children of Babel,
 And from the savage demons of . . .
 51 It flew in the likeness of an eagle,
 The king of all birds;
 52 It flew and alighted beside me,
 And became all speech.
 53 At its voice and the sound of its rustling,
 I started and arose from my sleep.
 54 I took it up and kissed it,
 And loosed its seal (?), (and) read;
 55 And according to what was traced on my heart
 Were the words of my letter written.
 56 I remembered that I was a son of kings,
 And my free soul longed for its natural state.
 57 I remembered the pearl,
 For which I had been sent to Egypt,
 58 And I began to charm him,
 The terrible loud-breathing serpent.

59 ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ 59
 ܕܝܕܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܥܝܬܐ
 60 ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ 60
 ܠܡܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ
 61 ܠܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ 61
 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 62 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ 62
 ܠܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 63 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ 63
 ܠܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 64 ܠܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܡܬܠܝܬܐ 64
 ܕܡܬܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 65 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ 65
 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 66 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ 66
 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ
 67 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ 67
 ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ

59^b MS ܡܠܬܐ ܠܚܐ65^a MS ܕܝܕܝܬܐ63^a MS ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ66^a MS orig. ܠܚܐ ܕܠܝܬܐ

59 I hushed him to sleep and lulled him into slumber,
 For my Father's name I named over him,
 60 And the name of our next in rank,
 And of my Mother, the queen of the East;
 61 And I snatched away the pearl,
 And turned to go back to my Father's house.
 62 And their filthy and unclean garb
 I stripped off, and left it in their country,
 63 And I took my way straight to come
 To the light of our home, the East.
 64 And my letter, my awakener,
 I found before me on the road,
 65 And as with its voice it had awakened me
 (So) too with its light it was leading me
 66
 Shone before me with its form,
 67 And with its voice and its guidance
 It also encouraged me to speed,



* * * * 68
 ܐܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 69
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 70
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 71
 * * * *
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 72
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 73
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 74
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 75
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ 76
 ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ ܕܢܝܢܐ

68^b MS ܕܢܝܢܐ

71^a ܕܢܝܢܐ (sic)—the ܢ is quite distinct in the MS

72^a MS ܕܢܝܢܐ marg. ܕܢܝܢܐ

73^a MS ܕܢܝܢܐ

76^b MS ܕܢܝܢܐ

68 * * * *
 And with his (?) love was drawing me on.
 69 I went forth, passed by
 I left Babel on my left hand,
 70 And reached Maishān the great,
 The haven of the merchants,
 71 That sitteth on the shore of the sea
 * * * *
 72 And my bright robe, which I had stripped off,
 And the toga wherein it was wrapped,
 73 From the heights of Hyrcania (?)
 My parents sent thither,
 74 By the hand of their treasurers,
 Who in their faithfulness could be trusted therewith.
 75 And because I remembered not its fashion—
 For in my childhood I had left it in my Father's house—
 76 On a sudden, as I faced it,
 The garment seemed to me like a mirror of myself.

77 ܠܗ ܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 78 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 79 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 80 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 81 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 82 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 83 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 84 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 85 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 86 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ
 ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ ܕܝܬܐ

77^a MS ܕܝܬܐ77^b MS ܕܝܬܐ82^a MS ܕܝܬܐ (sic) the ܐ being a later addition.

77 I saw it all in my whole self,
 Moreover I faced my whole self in (facing) it,
 78 For we were two in distinction
 And yet again one in one likeness.
 79 And the treasurers also,
 Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner,
 80 That they were twain (yet) one likeness,
 For one kingly sign was graven on them,
 81 Of *his* hands that restored to me (?)
 My treasure and my wealth by means of them,
 82 My bright embroidered robe,
 Which with glorious colours;
 83 With gold and with beryls,
 And rubies and agates (?)
 84 And sardonyxes varied in colour,
 It also was made ready in its home on high (?).
 85 And with stones of adamant
 All its seams were fastened;
 86 And the image of the King of kings
 Was depicted in full all over it,

87 87
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 88 88
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 89 89
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 90 90
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 91 91
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 92 92
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 93 93
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 94 94
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 95 95
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ
 96 96
 ܠܠܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ

87 And like the sapphire-stone also
 Were its manifold hues.
 88 Again I saw that all over it
 The motions of knowledge were stirring,
 89 And as if to speak
 I saw it also making itself ready.
 90 I heard the sound of its tones,
 Which it uttered to those who brought it down (?)
 91 Saying, "I
 Whom they reared for him (?) in the presence of my father,
 92 And I also perceived in myself
 'That my stature was growing according to his labours.'
 93 And in its kingly motions
 It was spreading itself out towards me,
 94 And in the hands of its givers
 It hastened that I might take it.
 95 And me too my love urged on
 That I should run to meet it and receive it,
 96 And I stretched forth and received it,
 With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself.

97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105	97 98 99 100 101 102 103 104 105
---	---

97^b MS **حلل** **حلل**

99^b MS **حد**

97 And my toga of brilliant colours
I cast around me, in its whole breadth.
98 I clothed myself therewith, and ascended
To the gate of salutation and homage;
99 I bowed my head, and did homage
To the Majesty of my Father who had sent it to me,
100 For I had done his commandments,
And he too had done what he promised,
101 And at the gate of his princes
I mingled with his nobles;
102 For he rejoiced in me and received me,
And I was with him in his kingdom.
103 And with the voice of . . .
All his servants glorify him.
104 And he promised that also to the gate
Of the King of kings I should speed with him,
105 And bringing my gift and my pearl
I should appear with him before our King.



1 כב יאן שפר יאוד

וצמר במלכותי בית מבי

2 וקדושה וקדושה

בארצותי אנה היום

3 אן מדינתא מן

בבדו אבדי לבדו

4 ומן צוהר צדק גבן

כר צמדו עי מושאן

5 סגיאא הי וקליא

באן למודי אסקנה

6 דהקא הי צדק גליא

וסאמא צגנק רחמא

7 וקרובני הנדו

8 ופירמא צמן בית קטן

9 ומקוני באבאוס

10 דלפרטא הי שחקא

11 נאמאני לצהיטא

12 דמחוקהון צדקה עי

13 ולסוגי צמחוריא

14 צד קומתי אמא נקיר

15 ודדו יצמי מורקנא

16 וכתבתי בלבי בלא יתעב

17 וכן חמור אגו מזרין

18 ויחיה למרגניא חבא

19 הי באיתה גג ימא

20 חדרהי בחויה סיקא

21 מלכיה לבייתא

22 ולסוגק דעליה מן

23 וצמ יתון מדין

24 ירוה במלכותי ויהא

- 16 שגרת מצינחא נחמה
- כז עמי תרין פרוקין
- 17 באורחא בחילא וצטלא
- (אונא) שגר אנא אמריה
- 18 עקרת תמותי מיין
- צוקא בגרי מצינחא
- 19 ומטיא לארע קדא
- ושלח קשוריה בסרקא
- 20 נחמה לי לגו מצרין
- ומלויני מני פרו
- 21 מרצה סור מויא
- מדרופי באשפיה שרית
- 22 עד וקום ודר נלכס
- למרגיחא אשקליה
- 23 ודמד הוית מלמד הוית
- עקי אלפצי נוכרי הוית
- 24 זכר גנסי זכר מארא
- מן מצינחילא ומן חציא
- 25 עטלא פשו פאיא אסיצא
- 26 קר מטיא ולי אלא גוף
- 27 ודקדקה קר עניי
- מקרא במאגורמא ליה שופר
- 28 צהרתי מן מצריא
- ומן נקפיון דמסיצא
- 29 ואיק לבושיון אקשר
- דלא נקדונוי במן זכר אריא
- 30 דאסקיה למרגיחא
- ונעירוייה מויא עלי
- 31 וקאיצא מן עלארא
- רגלויצא דויל מרבו
- 32 וגעט עמי קנפיון
- אף אטעומני מאכולתיו

(200;9-204,23)

¹⁰ *Concerning the Man who is ug[l]y / in his Body, [but] beautiful / [in his Soul]. /*

This chapter begins with a touching story about how Mani publicly embraces one of the elect, despite his deformity, in front of the assembled congregation who are laughing at his ugliness. It is the inner new man, formed by the Light Mind and religious practice, that is of lasting value.

This then leads Mani to develop an extended parable about pearls in their shells (the living soul in the physical body), pearl divers (the apostles), and traders (the sun and the moon). Mani like Jesus frequently used parables for effective teaching, and this motif of the pearl without price has an obvious heritage stemming from the Gospels through early Syriac Christian literature.

However, one distinctive feature of Mani's teaching was his desire to combine religious truths with total scientific knowledge, in order to establish a complete and integrated understanding of the world. Thus this parable begins with a lengthy discourse on the formation of pearls and their shells. While such features are of great historical interest for modern scholars, they did make Manichaeism a rather static religion, its teachings too easily undercut by advances in science.

[O]nce again it happened one time, while the apost[le] is [sitting among / a] great gathering, as some [... be]fore ¹⁵ [the] teachers and elders [... / ...] by the leaders and first citi[zens]. Now, he / [is s]itting down in their midst. All of a su[dden] one / of the elect came in to his presence, but no[t ... / ... he] is an elect [... ²⁰ ...] his commandments. He is an ugly [man] in his / [bod]y, having {}^{*112} [... / ...]^{*113} in his midriff; but he is perfec[t in] his [h]oly righteousnes[s]. / He is a man who is upright in his truthfulness[s. /

W]hen he came in, he spread himself on the ground and paid hom[age ²⁵ b]efore the apostle in love. The mass[es o/] well-born men and free women cast their [ey/e]s about and saw that elect crying o[ut in] his joy, exulting loudly and giving praise. When [they] / looked and saw him, ugly of body, havin[g] ³⁰ {}, they

^{*112} καθρανε ἡλιοστος Also 200.30

^{*113} Smagina 1990:122 restores κυρτός 'bent'.

[a]ll mocked him and [sc/of]fed at him. They were speaking to one another a[bout him] / with laughter and scorn [... but the laugh]/ter did not trouble [that] ele[ct. (201) He was paying homage all the time, giving praise [... / ...] the glorious one stood u[p / from the ju]dgement seat; where he is s[itt]ing. He drew and gathered him [in / to him], and hugged him to his body, kiss[ing] ⁵ that elect. He sat do[wn / ...]

And [when] he had sat upon his judgement seat [... / ...] with the entire congregation of well-born men a[nd] / free women sitting before him. He says to them: W[h]/y do you laugh at this man, in whom the [Lig]ht Mind ¹⁰ and belief dwell? For what reason a[re you / g]aping at a person who is ugly of body [... / ...] in front of you because of the flesh [... / ...] outwardly; yet within great is [... / ...] is like a great [... ¹⁵ ...] if he has no worth by his deeds, by [his / p]rayer and fasting and humility. He is like [a] / sharp [k]nife that might devour its [... / ...] its humiliations [...] that you see [... / ...] he destroys [...] and [... ²⁰ ...] while the [o]ld man [... / ...] you [...] he sculpts [... / ...] he is perfect in his limbs [... / ...] a young royal child, who is beautif[ul ... / ...] shape, as the beauty and loveliness is despoiled [... ²⁵ ...] the image that is fixed outwardly [... / ...] and is displayed and unveiled to you. / Its heart would not bear you to laugh at this old man [... / ...] because whoever will laugh at him possess a g[reat / sin] be[f]ore God. For the [saviour] says: ³⁰ [He who sha]res something with these least of the faithful, who [... / ...] their angel sees the face of the Father daily*¹¹⁴.

(202) [...] all heard these words [that the apost/le] uttered about this elect [... / ...] they gazed at him, he [... / ...] and he was in their presence like the [... ⁵ ...] truth, when its worth is perfected*¹¹⁵ [... / ...] upon him. When they were settled, they sat [... / w]hile his disciples stand.

They [paid homage, saying] / to him: Tell us, our master, [... / ...] how (pearls) came about and were formed in [the s]e[a ¹⁰ ...]

*¹¹⁴ Mt. 18:10

*¹¹⁵ This phrase recurs at 203.16 (see also 201.15), and links the two halves of the kephalaion. Presumably, the ugly elect is compared to a perfect pearl, which then leads the disciples to their question about how such are formed.

+The enlightener says to them:*¹¹⁶ Pearls shall ar/[ise not] in every place in the sea, nor be formed / [in the s]ea as a whole. Rather, in various places that are in this s/[ea], pearls are formed in them [... / ...] that [sea, in whic]h the [pearls] shall be formed ¹⁵ [...] this [... / ...] what the sea shall [... / ...] its fire [blazes]*¹¹⁷ above and comes [down ... / ...] and it makes foam like the drop of water that flows / [...] down in rainwater [... ²⁰ ...] is the water [... / ... d]own first [... / ...] foam and comes down [... / ...] the sweet waters [... / ...] the waters. This drop of water shall [... ²⁵ d]own to the sweet waters and [...] / and they absorbed them and were combined with the [...] They did not / d]escend to the depths of the sea, but they [... / ...] it floated on the surface of the waters [... / ...] to it. The foam and the pearl-shell shall be formed [... ³⁰ ...] this wholesome drop [... / ...] it, and it becomes a pe[arl ...] / that makes a drop of rainwater [...] / waters [...] (203) it not being whole. It breaks and separates out into [m]any droplets, / and it has time to become a drop of sweet water [...] / and comes up in the sea of [...] rain / [a]nd sweet water; and it is accomodated in the shell, which ⁵ at first is foam. They shall be joined with each other at [this] / time, and are shaped and become a great pea[rl], / a great and valued kind. When, however, a / drop of rainwater falls, and that drop / breaks into many droplets and various [particles of water]*¹¹⁸, ¹⁰ they shall be formed into and be confined in [n]umerous pearls; / in the shell and the pearl-shell. One might [for]/m two pearls, another may form three, / others may form five; some mould more than t/hese, so[m]e fewer.

Now, when you might [find a] ¹⁵ whole drop, and the shell receives it, it shall become a great and valued [pe]/arl as its worth is perfected. [However], if / these two droplets will have time (to adhere) to one another / before any [water particle] escapes, and they mix with e[ach / o]ther, and the shell [...] before they break into [... ²⁰ ...] within [...] in a great kind [... / ...] the drop of rain, which [... / ...] another one, that [... / ...] the [w]aters form them in [...] and / in a great, valued commodity.

*¹¹⁶ Corrupt text reads ΠΑΙΔΕΘ ἈΦΩΣΤΗΡ ΔΥ ΖΕ

*¹¹⁷ ΘΩΞΤ

*¹¹⁸ ΖΛΔΥΖΛΔΥ unknown word, presumably a reduplicated synonym for ΤΑΤΑΕ 'droplets'. Also occurs as ΖΛΔΥ in line 18 below.

Behold, [I, ²⁵ I have] taught you how / sea-pearls shall be formed. I have told you that as a pe/[a]rl shall come into existence by means of rainwater that has [ti]/me to become foam, the pearl-shell shall come into existence by means of the foam, a/nd the foam itself comes into being by means of the transformation^{*119} and the [...] ³⁰ of the sea.

Then immediately at the time when [...] / [...] the pearl divers know it, they shall [...] and they / [...] d]own to those places [and t]hey bring pea(204)rls up from the depths of the sea, and / each pearl diver finds according to the fortune that is / [ordai]ned for him. The pearl divers shall [gi]ve them to the traders, and the t/[ra]ders give them to the kings and the nobles.

⁵ This is also what the holy church is like. / It shall be gathered in from the living soul, / gathered up and brought to the heights, raised from the s/ea and placed in the flesh of mankind; while the flesh / of mankind itself is like the shell and the pearl-shell.

¹⁰ [The] booty that shall be seized is like the dr[op of / r]ainwater, while the apostles are like the divers. / The traders are the light-givers of the heavens; the kings and no/b[le]s are the aeons of greatness.

[F]o[r a]ll the souls / that ascend in the flesh of [ma]nk[ind] and ¹⁵ are freed shall be brought back to the great aeons of light. / A place of rest comes about for them, at that place in the ae/ons of greatness.

You to[o, my] / b[elo]ved ones, struggle in every way so that you will become good pea/r]ls and be accounted to heaven by the light diver. ²⁰ He will come to you and bring [you] back to [...] the] great / chief merchant, and you will rest in the life for e/[ve]r. You have [...] / [...] and the light.

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AT CLAREMONT



10017036969

Ephrem the Syrian

HYMNS



THE
INSTITUTE
FOR
ANTIQUITY
AND
CHRISTIANITY

From the library of

Ernest W. Tune, Th.D.

**THE CLASSICS
OF WESTERN
SPIRITUALITY**

THE CLASSICS OF WESTERN SPIRITUALITY

A Library of the Great Spiritual Masters

President and Publisher
Kevin A. Lynch, C.S.P.

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor-in-Chief

Bernard McGinn—Professor of Historical Theology and the History of Christianity, Divinity School, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Editorial Consultant

Ewert H. Cousins—Professor of Theology, Fordham University, Bronx, N.Y.

John E. Booty—Professor of Anglican Studies, School of Theology, University of the South, Sewanee, Tenn.

Joseph Dan—Professor of Kabbalah, Department of Jewish Thought, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

Albert Deblaere—Professor of the History of Spirituality, Gregorian University, Rome, Italy.

Louis Dupré—T. L. Riggs Professor of Philosophy of Religion, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

Rozanne Elder—Executive Vice-President, Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Mich.

Anne Freemantle—Teacher, Editor and Writer, New York, N.Y.

Karlfried Froehlich—Professor of the History of the Early and Medieval Church, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J.

Arthur Green—President, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, Wyncote, Pa.

Stanley S. Harakas—Archbishop Iakovos Professor of Orthodox Theology, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary, Brookline, Mass.

Moshe Idel—Professor of Jewish Thought, Department of Jewish Thought, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel.

Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia—Fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford, Spalding Lecturer in Eastern Orthodox Studies, Oxford University, England.

Jean Leclercq—Professor of Spirituality, Institute of Spirituality and of Religious Psychology, Gregorian University, Rome, Italy.

George A. Maloney—Spiritual Writer and Lecturer, Seal Beach, Calif.

John Meyendorff—Professor of Church History, Fordham University, Bronx, N.Y., and Professor of Patristics and Church History, St. Vladimir's Seminary, Tuckahoe, N.Y.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr—Professor of Islamic Studies, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.

Heiko A. Oberman—Professor for Medieval, Renaissance and Reformation History, University of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

Raimundo Panikkar—Professor, Department of Religious Studies, University of California at Santa Barbara, Calif.

Jaroslav Pelikan—Sterling Professor of History and Religious Studies, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

Annemarie B. Schimmel—Professor of Indo-Muslim Culture, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

Sandra M. Schneiders—Associate Professor of New Testament Studies and Spirituality, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley, Calif.

Huston Smith—Thomas J. Watson Professor of Religion Emeritus, Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.

John R. Sommerfeldt—Professor of History, University of Dallas, Irving, Tex.

David Steindl-Rast—Spiritual Author, Benedictine Grange, West Redding, Conn.

David Tracy—Greeley Professor of Roman Catholic Studies, Divinity School, University of Chicago, Chicago, Ill.

Rowan D. Williams—Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity and Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, England.

5
632
5
989

Library
Theological Library
St. John's University
Collegeville, MN

Ephrem the Syrian

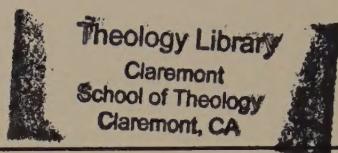
HYMNS

TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY
KATHLEEN E. McVEY

PREFACE BY
JOHN MEYENDORFF



PAULIST PRESS
NEW YORK • MAHWAH



Cover art: The Icon of Saint Ephrem the Syrian was written by ANDRIJ MADAY, an Iconographer of the Holy Orthodox Church. He has been involved in Iconography for a number of years now, independently studying the craft as well as the scripture which Icons portray. Andrij's desire is "to live and work for the glory of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, which is a difficult struggle, a struggle toward the complete surrender to His Holy Will." Andrij asks only that the readers remember Iconographers in their prayers.

The preparation of this volume was made possible by a grant from the Translations Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent Federal agency.

Copyright © 1989 by
Kathleen E. McVey

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the publisher.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ephraem, Syrus, Saint, 303–373.

[Hymns. English. Selections]

Ephrem the Syrian : hymns / [translated] by Kathleen E. McVey.

p. cm.—(Classics of Western spirituality)

Includes bibliographical references.

Contents: Hymns on the Nativity—Hymns against Julian—The hymns on virginity and on the symbols of the Lord.

ISBN 0-8091-0429-6 : \$17.95 (est.).—ISBN 0-8091-3093-9 (pbk.) : \$14.95 (est.)

1. Hymns, English—Translations from Syriac. 2. Hymns, Syriac—Translations into English. I. McVey, Kathleen E., 1944—

II. Title. III. Series.

BR65.E362E5 1989

264'.01402—dc20

Published by Paulist Press
997 Macarthur Boulevard
Mahwah, New Jersey 07430

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Contents

Foreword	xi
Preface	1
Introduction	3
Abbreviations	49
Hymns on the Nativity	61
Hymns against Julian	219
The Hymns on Virginity and on the Symbols of the Lord	259
Index	469

For my parents

Translator of This Volume

KATHLEEN E. McVEY is associate professor of early and eastern church history at Princeton Theological Seminary. She is a graduate of Radcliffe College (A.B. 1966), where she majored in Russian history and literature and wrote her senior thesis on Georges Florovsky. She has studied church history at Harvard, and Syriac and Coptic at the Catholic University of America, and she has excavated with the American School of Oriental Research at Carthage in Tunisia and at Idalion in Cyprus. After receiving the doctorate at Harvard in 1977, she was awarded a visiting fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies in Washington, D.C. In the capacity of Catholic Biblical Association visiting professor she taught at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem for one year before joining the faculty at Princeton in 1979. Her previous publications include articles in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* and in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* as well as several reviews in *Theology Today*, the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* and the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. She has been a member of the Council of the American Society of Church History, is presently a member of the board of directors of the North American Patristic Society, and is a member of the the editorial board of the *Fathers of the Church* series. She lives with her husband and two children in Princeton, New Jersey, where she is presently working on a book on George, Bishop of the Arabs, the subject of her doctoral dissertation.

Author of the Preface

JOHN MEYENDORFF is professor of history at Fordham University and professor and dean at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Crestwood, New York. He received the degree of *Docteur ès lettres* at the Sorbonne, Paris, in 1958 and has been on the faculty of Harvard University, Center for Byzantine Studies, Dumbarton Oaks (1960–67) where he also served as acting director of studies (1978). Father

Meyendorff is an internationally esteemed authority on Eastern Christian history, theology and spirituality and a corresponding Fellow, The British Academy. His books include *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (1959), *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (1969) and *Byzantium and the Rise of Russia* (1981).

Foreword

The production of this book has occupied a larger segment of my life than I could have imagined when I began. As a consequence it is simply impossible to name all those to whom I am indebted for professional insight or personal support in this project. Before attempting to enumerate some of them, however, I would like to make a few remarks about the picture of Ephrem on the cover and its relation to the contents of the book.

The artist's representation is based on the Greek Orthodox iconographic tradition for the portrayal of St. Ephrem. Garbed in a monastic habit, he holds a scroll on which is inscribed an admonition against mixing seriousness with laughter. This is quite consistent with the literary and theological themes of the corpus of writings in Greek attributed to him. The accuracy of these attributions, however, is doubtful at best. Although the transitoriness of life and the consequent need for penitence figure in the Syriac hymns, especially in the *Hymns on Paradise*, the *Carmina Nisibena* and the *Hymns against Julian*, they are not Ephrem's predominant themes. A very different icon of the saint emerges if only the authentic Syriac writings are mixed on our palette: a symbolic-poet-theologian entranced with the paradox of the Incarnation of the ineffable God and with the Divine presence in Nature and Scripture. During the last years of his life, moreover, Ephrem was a deacon of the Church at Edessa; he was never a monk. Neither a member of a monastic community nor a hermit, he was instead an ascetic of a peculiarly Syrian sort, an *yhydy'*, a solitary or "single" one, a celibate living in the ordinary Christian congregation as the special representative of Christ, the "Only-begotten." In the *Hymns on Virginity and the Symbols of the Lord* he draws out the theological implications of this understanding of the ascetic life and clarifies its relation to his symbolic theology. Unfortunately practical concerns prevented

FOREWORD

the production of a cover more consistent with the Syriac traditions and thus with the content of the hymns translated here.

Many people have provided me with vital encouragement and useful criticism in the production of this book. First I wish to thank John Meyendorff for suggesting I might make a contribution from the Syriac Christian tradition to the Classics of Western Spirituality series. Thanks to a translation grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, matched by funds from Princeton Theological Seminary, I was able to work exclusively on this project in the spring semester of 1984. From Sebastian Brock, Robert Murray and Hans J.W. Drijvers I received useful initial advice on methods and style of translation. I am appreciative of conversations about Ephrem, Judaism and Julian the Apostate with David Levenson, Martha Himmelfarb, Robert Kraft and other members of the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins. I am especially indebted to Sidney Griffith, as well as to Glen Bowersock, David Bundy, Luisa Abramowski, John Strugnell and Corby Finney, for reading earlier drafts of portions of the manuscript and for offering both encouragement and constructive criticism. John Gager and Elizabeth Clark generously agreed to read through the completed manuscript. Of course any remaining flaws are solely my responsibility. For conscientious typing and word-processing of portions of the manuscript I am grateful to Elizabeth Meirs, Maude Farrow and Helaine Randerson. For encouragement to plunge into the wordprocessing world with this translation project and for correctly diagnosing my ailing computer I am indebted to Charles Willard and James Armstrong respectively. The editors of the Classics of Western Spirituality series, John Farina and Bernard McGinn, and the editorial staff of Paulist Press, especially Pat Egan and Georgia Christo, have been graciously helpful.

I am thankful for the interest and support of my colleagues at Princeton Theological Seminary, especially, although not exclusively, Karlfried Froehlich, Chris Beker, Betty Edwards, Freda Gardner, Lois Livezey, Kathie Sakenfeld, Jean-Loup Seban and the other members of the history department. Other friends have provided personal support, sometimes from afar, especially Faine McMullen, Kate Skrebutenas, Joan Biella, Kathryn Nichols, Maurice Phillips, and my sister Elizabeth McVey. All the members of my family—my mother and sisters as well as my husband and children—have graciously admitted Ephrem to their midst for many years.

FOREWORD

In the preparation of this translation I have relied on the critical texts by Edmund Beck. His German translations, notes and cross references have often been useful as well. Nevertheless I have translated from the Syriac text, have made my own judgments about the relevance of biblical citations and cross references, and have added some discussion of the secondary literature. Since the principal dialogue in technical matters is with Beck, and since I have followed his numbering of hymns and strophes, I have not used page numbers in referring to his work; the reader will find the relevant passage by consulting the corresponding hymn, strophe and line of his edition in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*.

In rendering Ephrem's Syriac into English I have tried to be as literal as possible without sacrificing grace and fluidity. In the interest of eloquence, I have routinely omitted "behold" and the otiose "and" and have freely transformed relative clauses and genitive phrases into participles or adjectives where appropriate. As much as possible I have preserved the structure of Ephrem's thought by leaving his lines and half-lines of poetry intact. At times when this obscured the meaning or awkwardly halted the flow of words, especially in the *casus pendens* construction, however, I have changed the word order or cut the lines to suit aesthetic rather than scholarly criteria. My intention has been to use a single English word to render a given Syriac word except where a significant change of nuance dictated a different choice. In at least two instances, however, I have discovered unintended inconsistencies too late in the publication process to correct them: Syriac *knr'* is rendered variously as "lyre" or "harp," and '*m*' and its plural are translated in some hymns as "the People" and "the peoples" and in others as "the [Jewish] people" and "the Gentiles." Words in brackets have been supplied by me. Ellipses indicate a lacuna in the Syriac text. Since scientifically correct transliteration poses some difficulties for the general reader and especially for the typesetter, I have tried to follow a course of moderate compromise, being consistent in my inconsistencies! Conventional spellings of proper names, grammatical terms, letters of the Syriac alphabet and months of the year have been used. All other Syriac words have been more precisely transliterated using the equivalents in T. Nöldeke's *Kurzgefasste Syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1898; rep. Darmstadt, 1966), p. 2, without indicating softening or doubling of consonants and without vocalization except when a pun is dependent on differing vocalizations.

Preface

The idea that the early Christian tradition was limited to its Greek and Latin expressions is still widespread. This assumption distorts historical reality and weakens greatly our understanding of the roots of Christian theology and spirituality. In the third and fourth centuries Syriac was the third international language of the church. It served as the major means of communication in the Roman diocese of the “East,” which included Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia. It was the vehicle of Christian missionary expansion in Persia, Armenia, Georgia, India, and even Ethiopia. Furthermore, and most important, Syriac was a dialect of Aramean, the language spoken by Jesus and his immediate disciples. Jewish communities existed in Syriac-speaking countries at the time of Christ, and it is possible to assume a very early Christian presence in their midst. Although direct evidence is lacking, spiritual, theological and personal contacts between the Judeo-Christians in Palestine and early Syrian Christianity are probable. The legend of the correspondence between Jesus and King Abgar of Edessa, and the story of the image of Christ “not-made-with-hands” received by the king, might be a later reflection of such contacts, preserved in the memory of Syrian Christians.

St. Ephrem is the only Syrian writer who—for the historical reasons described by Dr. McVey in her Introduction—was well-known and admired among his Greek and Latin contemporaries. His name entered the lists of venerated saints in the East and in the West, and his writings influenced liturgical hymnography. Whether or not one is able to read him in the original Syriac, one has to acknowledge that he is the greatest Christian poet of his age. One can only regret that there seems to be no way of restoring the musical melodies, which he doubtlessly composed also, and which were an integral part of his meditation on the mysteries of the faith.

PREFACE

An orthodox Nicean Christian living in the midst of doctrinal controversies involving Arianism, Manicheism, Marcionism, as well as the still powerful pagan tradition and Judeo-Christian polemics, Ephrem is always able to transcend frozen formulas and to maintain that extraordinary biblical freshness that gives the early Syriac Christian tradition a flavor of true universality. This is particularly true of Ephrem's theology of the incarnation, his sacramental typology and his understanding of ethical issues.

There are numerous translations of Ephrem into German and French, but he remains relatively inaccessible to those who read only English. In this volume Dr. McVey offers three large collections of Ephrem's *Hymns*, translated in a smooth and highly readable English.

As a Syriac specialist, concerned not only with erudition in a difficult field but also with making the tradition of the Fathers a living source of Christian thought for many, Dr. McVey joins the increasing group of scholars who—following the lead of Robert Murray and Sebastian Brock—are making the Syriac Christian writers better-known to English-speaking readers.

John Meyendorff

Introduction

I Ephrem the Syrian and His Importance for Christian History and Theology

Ephrem the Syrian, the foremost writer in the Syriac tradition of Christianity, was born in Nisibis near the beginning of the fourth century C.E. and spent his early life there, teaching and writing hymns, homilies and commentaries, with the approval of a succession of orthodox bishops. The Roman loss to Persia in 363 C.E. forced him, along with the rest of the citizenry, to abandon his native city and move westward in order to remain within the Roman Empire. He continued his rich literary production in Edessa, where he is said to have established both a school of biblical and theological studies and women's choirs to sing his hymns. Ordained to the diaconate, he died while ministering to victims of the plague in 373 C.E.¹

Ephrem's importance for the history of Syriac literature and for the history of Christianity in the Syriac-speaking context is immense. His hymns, incorporated early into the liturgy, have remained central in both the East and West Syrian liturgical traditions. From this paramount position they have exerted a formative influence on all aspects of ecclesiastical life. The literary and hymnic forms that he used, some of which he may have invented, became the standard forms of all subsequent Syriac literature and hymnography. Although his works incorporate many of the themes found in the Jewish-Christian or Gnostic writings of the earliest Syriac Christianity, Ephrem's commitment to Nicene orthodoxy set the subsequent direction of the Syriac Church. In his own lifetime and for a half-century thereafter his method of biblical interpretation was the sole

1. Soz. HE 3.16; Pall. H. Laus. 40.

INTRODUCTION

standard among Syriac writers. Even after the formal introduction of Greek hermeneutical methods in the fifth century, Ephrem's interpretations continued to be studied and held in esteem. Despite uncertainty over the precise lines of his contact with Greek culture, not only a concept of orthodoxy but also many philosophical presuppositions and literary forms analogous to those of Greek Christian theological literature are to be found in his work, and through him they descend in the Syriac heritage.

Appreciation of Ephrem's hymns was not limited to those who spoke Syriac. Among the Eastern traditions most closely allied with the Syriac—Greek, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, and, later, Arabic—he found a place almost as central as in his own tradition. Writing within decades of his death Jerome attests to his fame in the Latin church as well.² At about the same time and with an enthusiasm perhaps predictable in a man named after the feast, Epiphanius cites with approval the Syrian poet's association of Christ and the Twelve with the Epiphany, the thirteenth day after the winter solstice.³ The fifth-century Greek ecclesiastical writers Palladius, Theodoret and Sozomen include him in their histories, where he is not only portrayed as a model of the ascetic life—a role he shared with many others—but also readily appreciated for his extraordinary poetic gift.⁴ Both Jerome and Sozomen assert that even in translation they were able to appreciate his eloquence.⁵ According to Sozomen the translation of his works into Greek had begun even during his lifetime, and in the following centuries they were translated into virtually every language known to Christianity.⁶ Although study of the nature and extent of his influence on

2. Hier. de vir. ill. 115.

3. Nat. 5.13, cf. Epiph. Pan. 52.22.7; noted by Beck, Lobgesang, 11.

4. Theod. HE 4.26; Soz. loc. cit.; Pall. loc. cit.

5. Hier. loc. cit; Soz. loc. cit.

6. Soz. loc. cit. Like other illustrious writers Ephrem was also frequently credited with the compositions of others. The task of sorting the authentic works from the spurious is often complex. For an overview of the editions of his Syriac corpus and a thorough discussion of the criteria of authenticity used by Burkitt, Vööbus and Beck, cf. J. Melki, "Saint Éphrem: Bilan de l'Édition Critique," PdO 11 (1983), 3–88. The task of sorting authentic from pseudo-Ephrem in the translation traditions is even more difficult; for a survey of the texts and secondary literature, cf. D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou and Jean Kirchmeyer, "Éphrem (Les versions)," *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* 4 (1960), 800–22; further, on the Arabic versions, Kh. Samir, "L'Éphrem arabe. État des travaux," OCA 205 (1978), 229–42; on the Latin, M. Schmidt, "Ephraem Latinus," ZDMG suppl. 4 (1980), 181–84; on the Armenian and Georgian, B. Outtier, "Les recueils géorgiens d'oeuvres attribuées à S. Éphrem le Syrien," BK 32 (1974), 118–25; idem, "Les recueils arméniens et géorgiens d'oeuvres attribuées à S. Éphrem le Syrien," Actes 29e congrès international des orientalistes, *Orient chrétien* (1975), 53–58; in Greek, M. Geerard, "Ephraem Graecus" in *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* II (Turnhout, 1974), 366–468.

INTRODUCTION

later Western Christianity is still in a fairly rudimentary stage, it is clear that he played a significant role in the development of both Byzantine hymnography and Western medieval religious drama.⁷

II Ephrem's Life in Political and Social Context

A Nisibis and Its Christians

Nisibis, the birthplace of Ephrem Syrus, was a major commercial and political center in northeastern Mesopotamia.⁸ Situated on a fertile plain adjacent to the River Mygdonius, the city had been an urban center for well over a millennium before his time.⁹ Its population was a conglomeration of Arameans, Arabs, Greeks, Jews, Parthians, Romans, and Iranians. The culture, and consequently the pre-Christian religion, consisted of a complex mixture of elements distilled from the several civilizations that had held sway there through the prior centuries.¹⁰ The pagan deities

7. For his influence on Romanos the Melode, cf. William L. Petersen, *The Diatesseron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, (CSCO v. 466, subsidia 73; Louvain, 1986), with a summary and discussion of the earlier literature on this subject, pp. 1–13. For the influence of Romanos on western medieval drama, cf. G. La Piana, *Le Rappresentazioni Sacre nelle Letteratura Bizantina dalle Origini al sec. 9*, (Grottaferrata, 1912); M. Carpenter, "Romanos and the Mystery Play of the East," in *Philological Studies in Honor of Walter Miller*, University of Missouri Studies 11.3 (1936), 21–51; and W. Greisenegger, *Die Realität im Religiösen Theater des mittelalters*, (Wien, 1978), 18, n. 32. For the evidence of direct influence of Ephrem on the development of western medieval drama cf. Margot Schmidt, "Orientalischer Einfluss auf die deutsche Literatur. Quellengeschichtliche Studien zum 'Abraham' der Hrotsvit von Ganderheim," *Colloquia Germanica* 1/2 (1968), 152–87; a condensed French version of this article appears as "Influence de saint Éphrem sur la littérature latine et allemande du début du moyen-âge," *PdO* 4 (1973), 325–41; also cf. August C. Mahr, *Relations of Passion Plays to St. Ephrem the Syrian* (Columbus, 1942).

8. On Nisibis as the birthplace of Ephrem, cf. Sozomen, *HE* 3.16. Although several "lives" of Ephrem exist in Greek and Syriac, some of them claiming Ephrem's own authorship, none can be traced to him or to his contemporaries. The most trustworthy data for Ephrem's life are incidental remarks in his writings; next are the Greek accounts of Palladius, Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret; among Syriac sources the most reliable are Jacob of Sarug and Barhadbshabba, cf. B. Outtier, O.S.B., "Saint Éphrem d'après ses biographies et ses oeuvres," *PdO* 4 (1973), 11–34. For enumeration and examination of the hagiographic sources and a less critical assessment of certain of them, cf. A. Vööbus, *Literal Critical and Historical Studies in Ephrem the Syrian*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 10, (Stockholm, 1958).

9. On Nisibis, cf. J. Sturm, *RE* 17, 714–57. Especially on the history of the Christian community of Nisibis, cf. J. M. Fiey, *Nisibe: metropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours*, CSCO 388, subsidia 54 (Louvain, 1977), on the early period, esp. 16–39.

10. There is no study of the religion of Nisibis itself in the relevant time period. Studies of the religion of the area as an aspect of the culture include works cited in Drijvers, *Persistence*, 41, nn. 1,2. The work of Drijvers with regard to other Mesopotamian cities, viz. Hatra, Palmyra and Edessa, is relevant; cf. *idem*, *Cults* and *idem*, *Hatra*.

INTRODUCTION

still worshipped in the fourth-century Mesopotamian cities included Babylonian gods, such as Bel and Nebo, and Aramean *baalim* and their consorts, more remotely derived from Phoenician religion. Subsequent to the Hellenistic and Roman dominations these deities were likely to have donned the name or characteristics of their counterparts from the Greco-Roman pantheon. Arab religious influence was to be found in the cults of the *djinni* and *gads*, as well as in a plethora of other gods and goddesses of whom the most frequently attested are Azizos, Monimos and Sams.

As speakers of Syriac, an east Aramean dialect, Ephrem and the Christian community to which he belonged were probably among the Aramean portion of the city's populace.¹¹ Evidence about the Christians there before his time is quite sparse. Only the epitaph of Bishop Aberkios of Hierapolis directly attests the existence of a Christian community at Nisibis among others in Mesopotamia in the late second century:

And I saw the plain of Syria and all the cities, even Nisibis,
having crossed the Euphrates. And everywhere I had associates.
Having Paul as a companion, everywhere faith led the way
and set before me for food the fish from the spring
mighty and pure, whom a spotless Virgin caught,
and gave this to friends to eat, always
having sweet wine and giving the mixed cup with bread.¹²

Although it is impossible to say with certainty what sort of community this was, it was probably a Syriac-speaking community evangelized either by Gnostic Christians from Edessa or by Jewish-Christian merchants travelling to Adiabene.¹³ Later legends with some claim to cre-

11. On the relation of Syriac to the other Aramaic dialects, cf. Sebastian Brock, "An Introduction to Syriac Studies," in *Horizons in Semitic Studies: Articles for the Student*, ed. J. H. Eaton (Birmingham, England, 1980), viii, 1-38, esp. 11-13.

12. On the Aberkios inscription, cf. Quasten, *Patrology*, (Utrecht, 1975), I, 171-73. W. M. Calder, *Anatolian Studies* 5 (1955), 25f. Wolfgang Wischmeyer, "Die Aberkiosinschrift als Grabepigramm," *JAC* 23 (1980), 22-47. J. M. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 19.

13. Every aspect of the question is controversial. If, on the basis of their common Syriac language, the Christian community at Nisibis is assumed to have originated from the slightly better-known church at Edessa, the earliest Syriac literature is the primary basis for its characterization. In Murray's estimation the prominent features of the literature are asceticism, artful prose in the Hellenistic style, and a rich symbolic imagination; cf. R. Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity," *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*, ed. N. G. Garsoian, T. F. Mathews and R. W. Thomson (Washington, D.C., 1982), 3-16. These features have been variously interpreted as indicative of a Christian community with

INTRODUCTION

dence identify Addai or his disciples Ahha and Mari as the apostle(s) of Nisibis.¹⁴

As the Christians of Mesopotamia emerge into the clearer light of history, their fate is closely intertwined with political events. Throughout the second and third centuries Nisibis had been a valuable prize in the struggle for control of Mesopotamia—first between the Parthians and Romans, then among the Sassanid Persians, Palmyrenes and Romans. In 298 A.D., after twelve years of campaigns in the East, the Roman Emperor Diocletian signed a treaty with Narses of Persia by which Roman control of the area was firmly reasserted. Thus after a half-century of Sassanid and Palmyrene control Nisibis was reestablished as the military and administrative center of Roman Mesopotamia and, in addition, as the sole point of commercial exchange between Romans and Persians.¹⁵ The first recorded consequence of this political transformation for Christians

Gnostic or Jewish-Christian leanings. For the view that the earliest Syriac-speaking Christian community subscribed to a Gnostic form of Christianity, cf. W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Earliest Christianity*, trans. from the second German edition by R. Kraft, G. Krodel et al. (Philadelphia, 1971); this view was forcefully reiterated for the city of Edessa itself by H.J.W. Drijvers in "Edessa und das jüdische Christentum," VC 24 (1970), 4–33. For the major opposing view, that early Syriac Christianity was a form of Jewish-Christianity derived from sectarian Judaism, cf. A. Vööbus, *A History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, I, CSCO 184, subs. 14 (Louvain, 1958), 3–108, and G. Quispel, "The Discussion of Judaic Christianity," VC 22 (1968), 81–93. Accepting a Gnostic origin of Christianity for Edessa but a Jewish-Christian origin in Adiabene is R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge, England, 1975), 4–24. A thorny problem with any claim for a distinctive Jewish-Christian heritage in Adiabene is that its principal evidence, the Chronicle of Arbela, is probably a forgery; cf. J. Assfalg, "Zur Textüberlieferung der Chronik von Arbela, Beobachtungen zu Ms. or. fol. 3126," OC (1966), 19–36, and J. M. Fiey, "Auteur et date de la Chronique d'Arbèles," OS 12 (1967), 265–302. Although this view has been modified or challenged by others, there is no consensus; cf. S. Brock, "Alphonse Mingana and the letter of Philoxenus to Abu 'Afr," BJRL 50 (1967), 199–206, esp. 200; and W. Hage, "Early Christianity in Mesopotamia: Some Remarks Concerning Authenticity of the Chronicle of Arbela" *The Harp* I.2–3 (1988), 39–46.

14. Fiey, Nisibe, 19.

15. Ibid. 19. Ephrem's contemporary, the unknown author of the *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, described Nisibis' unique status:

Even Mesopotamia has numerous and varied cities, of which I want to mention the excellent ones. They are, then, Nisibis and Edessa [read Amida rather than Edessa, as Fiey suggests], which have the best men of all, both especially wise in business and good hunters. Above all they are both rich and adorned with all goods. For, receiving from the Persians, they themselves cross over into all the land of the Romans, selling and buying again, except for bronze and iron, because it is not permitted to give bronze or iron to enemies. These cities, moreover, still standing by the wisdom of the gods and emperor, since they have famous walls, in war always dissipate the strength of the Persians; seething with business and transacting well with the entire province. Expositio XXII (J. Rougé, ed. trans., SC 124, Paris, 1966, 156; quoted in French by Fiey, Nisibe, 32).

INTRODUCTION

there was an unhappy one. Lists of the victims of the Diocletian persecution include several from Nisibis: the confessor, Hermas; a soldier, Adelphos; and Gaios; a group of three women, Olivia, Eutropia, and Leonis; and finally Febronia, to whom a basilica was later dedicated.¹⁶

B Ephrem's Early Years: ca. 306–37

Ephrem, born ca. 306, only a few years after the persecution, is the most important witness to the life of Christians in Nisibis in the early fourth century. His *Carmina Nisibena* describe the personalities and accomplishments of the first bishops whose names enter into the historical record there: Jacob, Babu, Vologeses and Abraham.¹⁷ When Jacob was appointed the first bishop of Nisibis in 308/9, it is probable that his appointment was made through the hierarchy within the Roman Empire rather than in Persia—an indirect consequence of the reestablishment of Roman Imperial control in the region.¹⁸ Perhaps for the first time, then, the church of Nisibis was brought into substantial contact with the churches of the West and with Western notions of orthodoxy and heresy. Ephrem portrays Jacob as a stern but loving parent, firmly leading the people from their immature ways:

by his simple [words] he gave milk to his infants . . .

[The Nisibene Church] was childlike with [him].

As with a child, he loved her and threatened her. . . .

The womb of him who gave birth to the flock bore her infancy. . . .

The first priest gave milk to her infancy. . . .

The wealthy father, laid up treasures for her childhood.¹⁹

During his thirty-year episcopacy major changes took place. Of the first importance was Constantine's rise to power and his subsequent adop-

16. For details and discussion of the evidence, cf. Fiey, Nisibe, 20f.

17. For analysis of the materials in Ephrem's CNis 13–21 on these bishops, cf. J. M. Fiey, "Les évêques de Nisibe au temps de saint Ephrem," PdO 4 (1973), 123–36; idem, Nisibe 21–38; also J. Martikainen, "Some Remarks About the Carmina Nisibena as a Literary and a Theological Source," OCA 197 (1974), 345–52; and I. Ortiz de Urbina, "L'évêque et son rôle d'après saint Ephrem," PdO 4 (1973), 137–46. For a discussion of other materials on Jacob's life, cf. P. Peeters, "La légende de St. Jacques de Nisibe," AB 38 (1920), 285–373, esp. 295–312.

18. Fiey, Nisibe, 23.

19. CNis 14.16–22; cf. Fiey, Nisibe, 22f.

INTRODUCTION

tion with Licinius of measures not only ending the persecutions of Christians in the Roman Empire but also restoring their confiscated property and even suggesting that the policy of persecution was wrong.²⁰ No doubt as a consequence of the new freedom enjoyed by Christians throughout the Roman Empire, the bishop undertook the construction of a church building at Nisibis between 313 and 320.²¹ The Council of Nicea in 325 c.e. intensified the relatively new focus on orthodox doctrine in general and on Trinitarian theology in particular. Perhaps Bishop Jacob availed himself of the emperor's offer of the use of the Imperial post to travel to Nicea for this first ecumenical council, since his presence there is well-attested.²²

Meanwhile Ephrem had spent his early years in this newly prospering church. On the basis of his own words in the *Hymns Against Heresies* we may deduce that his parents were members of the Christian community and that he was baptized in his youth after a period of study and reflection, perhaps in the context of a formal catechumenate:

By our Lord stand both:
[the time] when I was to enter into the creation
and when it would be good to leave it.
In the way of truth was I born
even though I as a child did not yet perceive it.
Examining, I acquired it for myself, as I perceived it.
My faith despised the confusing paths that came toward me.²³

20. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981), 62–65 and 318 n.4.

21. Fiey, Nisibe, 23.

22. On Constantine's offer, cf. Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* 3.6.1,9, cited by Barnes, 214, 379, n.49. Jacob of Nisibis is listed among the signatories of the Council, cf. Honigmann, *Liste*, p. 46 #74 and p. 62 #74; further, cf. Fiey, Nisibe, 23, n.51.

23. CH 26.10. So Edmund Beck argues in his *Ephräm der Syrer: Lobgesang aus der Wüste*, Sophia 7 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1967), 18. This reference to his birth in the orthodox Christian faith, admittedly vague, nevertheless outweighs the later hagiographic tradition that Ephrem's parents were a pagan priest and a Christian woman. As further evidence of youthful (but not infant) baptism and of a period of catechetical instruction, respectively, Beck adduces the following two excerpts from Ephrem's hymns:

Your truth [was] in my youth; Your truth [is] in my old age.
I rejected and expelled the party of the crucifiers;
I scorned graven images and the metal of strangers
and the new fraud that would be contrived to deceive us.

Virg. 37.10.1–4

I was taught and believed in You
Who are the only One.

INTRODUCTION

Upon his return from Nicea, Jacob appointed Ephrem interpreter or exegete of Nisibis. Two centuries later the official historian of the School of Nisibis would look back to this event as constituting its birth.²⁴

We may safely assume that Ephrem's production of hymns and prose works began in this period.²⁵ While some of these works may have been addressed to clergy in training, at least the hymns must have been written for a broader audience. Beginning characteristically with the unique Syriac type of ante-Nicene Christianity, its encratism,²⁶ Gnosticism and special relationship to Judaism, Ephrem introduced these features into an orthodox Christian framework, often through polemics. Although he freely and adeptly used the imagery of the non-canonical biblical literature, his work is self-consciously orthodox. He wrote commentaries not only on the canonical scripture but also on Tatian's *Diatesseron*, the most widespread version of the New Testament among the earliest Syriac-speaking Christians.²⁷ Like the *Odes of Solomon*, Ephrem's hymns sometimes use graphic feminine imagery for God.²⁸ His *Hymns on the Pearl* take

Through Your being I heard and held You as true,
You Who are Father through your Only-begotten.
I was three times baptized,
also in the name of the Holy Spirit.
I learned that it is all true,
that Your treasure remains impossible to investigate
although Your wealth is widespread.

CH 3.13

The view that Ephrem was baptized as a young adult is confirmed by the general practice as attested by early baptismal commentaries, which do not mention infant baptisands, cf. S. Brock, "Some Early Syriac Baptismal Commentaries," OCP 46 (1980), 20–61, esp. 30f.

24. Barhadbshabba 'Arbaya, *Cause de la Fondation des Écoles*, Texte Syriaque publié et traduit par A. Scher, PO 4.4 (1907), 327–97, cf. esp. 377. The office to which Ephrem was appointed was *mpšqn'*. On the interpretation of this office cf. A. Vööbus, *School of Nisibis*, 8f.; Outtier, Ephrem, PdO (1973), 25f.; Fiey, Nisibis, 24; Neusner, HJB III, 195–200.

25. Ephrem's works are difficult to date; for the sequence presumed here I have depended mainly on the proposals of Beck, presented in summary form in his *Lobgesang*, 14–18, and more systematically by Kronholm, *Motifs*, 20–25.

26. On the meaning of encratism and its importance for the ascetic, but not necessarily monastic, emphasis in early Syriac Christianity, cf. Murray, *Characteristics*, 6–9 and Brock, *Luminous*, 107–17.

27. For Ephrem's commentary, cf. Comm. Diat. On Tatian's gospel harmony and its place among the early Syriac biblical versions, cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations* (Oxford, 1977), 3–98, esp. 10–36.

28. Ephrem uses feminine imagery for each of the persons of the Trinity. For the Father's or the Divinity's womb, cf. Nat. 13.7, 21.7, 27.15 and 27.19; for the Son as mother through the incarnation, Nat. 149–54, cf. Nat. 23.5; and for the related concept of Christ as a bird, cf. Nat.

INTRODUCTION

up and develop the image of salvation as a precious pearl, an image which has roots not only in the New Testament but also in the Gnostic Hymn of the Pearl in the *Acts of Thomas*.²⁹ Yet his *Hymns Against Heresies* are polemical, attacking Mani, Marcion, Bardaisan and the astrologers.³⁰

Likewise with respect to Judaism he is unusually well-informed yet often strongly polemical. His *Hymns on Paradise* and his commentary on

17.1, 26.13, and Virg. 12.7 and 41.2; for references to the Holy Spirit using feminine pronouns, cf. Nat. 5.10 and Virg. 7.6; for God as weaver, the archetypal occupation of women in antiquity, cf. Nat. 21.5 (Father) and Virg. 37.6 (Christ); God as housekeeper, cf. CJ 2.11; for some suggestions of Ephrem's place among patristic writers on this subject, cf. esp. Nat. 17.1 and note *ad loc.*

For the feminine theological imagery in the Odes, cf. H.J.W. Drijvers, "The 19th Ode of Solomon: Its Interpretation and Place in Syrian Christianity," JTS n.s. 31 (1980), 337–55, esp. 352–55.

There is no consensus on the date, original language and theological orientation of the *Odes of Solomon*. For the text with English translation and bibliography to 1971, cf. J. Charlesworth, SBLTT 13 (Missoula, Montana, 1977). Charlesworth has argued for a Jewish-Christian rather than Gnostic context and an early second-century date for the Odes, cf. idem, "The Odes of Solomon—not Gnostic," CBQ 31 (1969), 357–69, and "The Odes of Solomon and the Gospel of John," CBQ 35 (1973), 298–322. For the argument that the Odes are an anti-Marcionite polemic and therefore to be dated ca. 200 C.E., cf. Drijvers, "Die Oden Salomos und die Polemik mit den Markioniten im syrischen Christentum," OCA 205 (1978), 39–55; more recently he has argued for a later date, first half of the third century, in "Kerygma und Logos in den Oden Salomos dargestellt am Beispiel der 23. Ode," in *Kerygma und Logos*, Festschrift C. Andresen (Göttingen, 1979), 153–72, and in "19th Ode," cited above, esp. 353; subsequently he argued a date of 275 C.E., in "Odes of Solomon and Psalms of Mani: Christians and Manichaeans in Third-century Syria," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions*, G. Quispel Festschrift, Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire Romain 91 (Leiden, 1981), 117–30, esp. 129. His argument is rejected by L. Abramowski, in "Sprache und Abfassungszeit der Oden Salomos" OC 68 (1984), 80–90; although in agreement with Drijvers' philosophical and apologetic parallels, she disputes the dependencies he derives from them. For recent bibliography (1971–85) and a survey of the scholarship on the Odes, cf. G. R. Blaszczak, *A Formcritical Study of Selected Odes of Solomon*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 36 (Atlanta, 1985), esp. 1–8, 137–55.

29. Ephrem's *Hymns on the Pearl* are numbers 81–87 of his *Hymns on Faith*; for the Syriac text with German translation, cf. E. Beck HdF; for French translation with comments, cf. F. Graffin, *Hymnes de saint Éphrem sur la perle*, L'OS 12 (1967), 129–50; for HdF 82 in English with comments, cf. Brock, *Harp*, 31–33; for a less satisfactory English version of all seven by J. B. Morris, cf. NPNF 13, 293–301. Ephrem explores the image of the pearl in other contexts as well, cf. Nat. 16.12 and Virg. 11.9.

As is the case for most of the early Syriac literature, the date, place, original language and theological provenience of the *Acts of Thomas* are disputed. For an English translation and discussion of the Syriac version with an argument for its priority over the Greek as well as its Jewish-Christian encratic rather than Gnostic character, cf. A.F.J. Klijn, *The Acts of Thomas*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum V (Leiden, 1962). For English translation of the Greek text, an argument for its priority and hence its originally Gnostic character, cf. G. Bornkamm in E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. W. Schneemelcher, English translation and edition by R. McL. Wilson, (Philadelphia, 1963–65), II, 425–531.

30. For the hymns, cf. CH. Although Kronholm dates this entire collection to Ephrem's Nisibene period, some must be from the Edessene period; cf. n. 109 below. To my knowledge Beck does not offer a dating of this group of hymns.

INTRODUCTION

Genesis and Exodus are permeated with non-canonical Jewish traditions.³¹ The *Carmina Nisibena* represent an appropriation of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament.³² On the other hand, the *Sermons on Faith* combine opposition to Judaizing with anti-Arian arguments, the *Paschal Hymns* combine polemics on the proper understanding of Jewish scripture and custom with a positive theology of the crucifixion and resurrection, and the *Nativity Hymns* present a developed theology of the incarnation and mariology in the context of a strong anti-Jewish polemic.

C Nisibis Under Siege: 337–50

From the political standpoint Ephrem's early years in the service of the church of Nisibis were relatively secure. Constantine's reign brought peace and even patronage for the Christians of the Roman Empire. The Christians of a border garrison like Nisibis might participate in this sense of well-being as long as relations between the two empires remained peaceful. Even when Shapur II reached his majority and began to consolidate his power in 325, he turned first to internal affairs and then to the East. Not until 335, when he had finished the task of bringing order to the eastern and central portions of his empire, did he turn toward his western frontier to begin the enterprise that would occupy the remainder of his long reign, the reconquest of Mesopotamia. When, as a first step he raided Armenia, he was quickly rebuffed by Constantine, who sent an army at the request of the Armenian nobility. Constantine's letter to Shapur, preserved in Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* may have been written at this time.³³ In the letter he asserts his faith in God, the providential nature of his own rule, and the certainty of Divine vengeance on the persecutors of Christians. His wishes that both Shapur and the Christians in the Persian realm prosper would probably have been overshadowed in

31. For Ephrem's hymns, cf. HdP. For his use of Jewish exegetical themes, cf. Séd, *hymnes sur paradis*; also cf. Levene, *Early Syrian Fathers*, and S. Hidal, *Interpretatio Syriaca. Die Kommentare des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers zu Genesis und Exodus mit besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer Auslegungsgeschichtlichen Stellung*, Lund, 1974; Nabil El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer* (Mainz, 1976); Kronholm, *Motifs*; S. Brock, "Jewish Traditions in Syriac Sources," *JJS* 30 (1979), 212–32; and Drijvers, *Jews*, esp. 100–1.

32. Cf. Martikainen, *Remarks*.

33. For a recent discussion of this correspondence, its authenticity and date, with references to earlier studies, cf. S. Brock, "Christians in the Sassanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties," *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982), 1–19; also cf. Neusner, *HJB* IV, 21ff.; and Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 258f., who thinks the letter may be "as early as 324/5," p. 397, n.144.

INTRODUCTION

Shapur's mind by the audacity of his *interpretatio christiana* of recent history, virtually an assertion that in a conflict between Persia and Rome, the latter would surely be victorious. Still more presumptuous is the Roman emperor's commendation of the Persian Christians to the Sassanid ruler's care, a veiled threat that they would be loyal to him rather than to their own sovereign in the event of war. Whether or not it was this letter that provoked Shapur's hostility to the Christians within his realm, he took advantage of Constantine's death in 337 to undertake a military campaign in Mesopotamia the following spring. In the course of this conflict Christians in the Persian Empire were treated as potential or actual traitors.

The Christians of Persia had themselves contributed to the mixing of religious interpretations with political and military events. Aphrahat, writing in an unknown location within the Persian Empire, was disposed to view the conflict in apocalyptic terms as a battle between the forces of good and evil with virtually no room for nuance or compromise.³⁴ Upon returning from his first Mesopotamian campaign Shapur imposed a double head-tax on the Christians of his empire. Many either refused or were simply unable to pay. Simeon bar Sabba'e, bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon and thereby representative of the Persian Christian community to the Sassanid government, informed the emperor that his people could not pay the double tax. As a consequence he and several of his associates met their deaths, and a lengthy and brutal persecution of Christians in the Persian Empire began.³⁵

The worsened relations between Christians and their Persian ruler could be expected to have an immediate effect on the determination of the Roman cities of Mesopotamia to resist capture. A second effect, less immediately obvious, was the deterioration of relations between Chris-

34. For the Syriac text, cf. Parisot, PS I, i (Paris, 1894), and PS I, ii (Paris, 1907). For an English translation of homilies 1,5,6,8,10,17,21,22, cf. J. Gwynn, NPNF 13.2, 345-412; for a more recent translation of homilies 11-13, 15-19, 21, and excerpts of 23, cf. J. Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran*, Studia Post Biblica 19 (Leiden, 1971). For bibliography and a resume of earlier scholarship, cf. Neusner, Aphrahat, 7-13. On Aphrahat's interpretation of the political situation, cf. especially the fifth homily, and Brock, Christians, 7f.

35. Accounts of the persecution are in J. Labourt, *Le christianisme dans l'empire perse sous la dynastie sassanide 224-632* (Paris, 1904), 43-82; A. Christensen, *L'Iran sous les sassanides* (Copenhagen, 1936), 258-68; Vööbus, *History of Asceticism*, I, 209-58; an important recent study of the *acta martyrum* is G. Wiessner, *Zur Märtyrerüberlieferung aus der Christenverfolgung Schapurs II*, Untersuchungen zur syrischen Literaturgeschichte I, Abh. Ak. Wiss. Göttingen (Göttingen, 1967); reviewed by S. Brock, JTS 19 (1968), 300-9.

INTRODUCTION

tians and Jews. The Jewish community had constituted a substantial minority throughout the region for nearly a millennium.³⁶ Nisibis itself had long been the center for the collection and transmission of the Temple offering from the Jews of northern Mesopotamia.³⁷ Since the early second century C.E. there had been a rabbinic school there, and the city had become a major center for rabbinic Judaism.³⁸ Although the Jewish community had been the object of some political and religious intolerance under the early Sassanid rulers, their lot had improved steadily just as the Christians' situation was declining.³⁹ Certain of the acts of the Persian Christian martyrs accuse the Jews of inciting the persecution by suggesting that the Christians were potentially disloyal to the Persian government. Whether or not this accusation is true, Jews were never more than minor characters in the Persian state persecution.⁴⁰ Yet the dramatic disparity between the conditions of the two communities in the Persian territories gave an apologetic advantage to the Jews, who apparently exploited the opportunity to recoup some of their losses in the competition for converts.⁴¹ Under the circumstances relations between the two religious communities were bound to be strained.

The restoration of Nisibis to the Roman Empire and Constantine's endorsement of Christianity had suddenly reversed the prospects of the Jews and Christians, but the reversal would last only as long as the city resisted Persian attack. Political and religious issues were tightly interwoven, and Ephrem was necessarily deeply involved in the conflicts. At least part of his task as the exegete of the Christian school of Nisibis must have been the elaboration of a Christian interpretation of the Old Testament—one that could compete with the growing sophistication of the rabbinic schools and attract to Christianity the uncertain, whether of Aramean pagan or Jewish background. In gathering *testimonia* that Jesus had fulfilled the Jewish expectations of a messiah and that he was anticipated in virtually every word and symbol of the Old Testament, Ephrem was not

36. J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia* (=HJB), I, 10–15.

37. Ibid. 13f. 43–50.

38. Ibid. 113–63.

39. Ibid. II, 27–91.

40. For a thorough discussion and overview of previous work on this issue, cf. J. Neusner, "Babylonian Jewry and Shapur II's Persecution of Christianity from 339 to 379," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 43 (1972), 77–102 (rep. in TJSB, 150–77).

41. According to Neusner, HJB III, 12–16, rabbinic sources of the late third century have more to say than earlier sources against the "minim."

INTRODUCTION

engaged in a novel enterprise. The debate with Judaism is as old as Christianity; it is well-attested and has been studied in Greek and Latin sources prior to and contemporary with him.⁴² The uniqueness of his endeavor lay in the fact that he taught in a city where the rabbinic traditions were well-established and sophisticated and where the Jewish community may have been more prosperous and numerous than its Christian counterpart.⁴³ Political developments in this border garrison in the mid-fourth century, moreover, had intensified this disparity. These conditions partially account for Ephrem's extraordinary bitterness toward the Jews, to whom he often refers as "slanderers," "crucifiers," or "murderers."⁴⁴

One of the cities unsuccessfully besieged by Shapur in his first Mesopotamian campaign was Nisibis. In his *Carmina Nisibena* Ephrem credited Bishop Jacob with the salvation of the city from this first siege, and later tradition was to magnify his role considerably.⁴⁵ Ephrem's mentor died soon after the successful rebuff of Shapur in 338. His successor, Babu, cared for a church beset with the problems of wartime.⁴⁶ The hymnodist praises him for his almsgiving and for his efforts at ransoming captives.⁴⁷ Although he also lauds his "plain teaching," his "interpretation [of scripture]," his orthodoxy and eucharistic ministry, the hymns give few clues as to the specific social or ecclesiastical issues of this episcopacy other than the ongoing warfare and its accompanying hardships.⁴⁸ The

42. M. Simon, *Verus Israel: Étude sur les Relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135–425)* (Paris, 1947; 2 ed. 1964) remains an important study; more recently, cf. R. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (New York, 1969); A. T. Davies, ed., *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York, 1979); J. Gager, *The Origins of Christian Anti-Semitism* (Oxford, 1983); and R. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage IV* (Berkeley, 1983). In the Syriac context, cf. S. Kazan, "Isaac of Antioch's Homily against the Jews," OC 45 (1961), 30–53, 46 (1962), 87–98; 47 (1963), 89–97; 49(1965), 57–78; A. M. Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew*, CSCO 338–39 (Louvain, 1973); M. Albert, *Jacques de Saroug, Homélies contre les juifs*, PO 38.1 (1976); A. P. Hayman, "The Image of the Jew in the Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs (Chico, California, 1985), 423–41; and Drijvers, *Jews*.

43. Radically disparate circumstances for the two communities are assumed by Murray, *Symbols*, 19.

44. For other possible sources of his strong antagonism, cf. comments on Ephrem's mariology and on the *Hymns against Julian*.

45. The siege lasted sixty-three days, cf. RE ser.I, v. 4, col. 1047f. On the role attributed to Jacob and confusions of the three sieges, cf. Peeters, *Legende*, 295–312.

46. Cf. CNis 13.4.2, 13.5.2, 13.6.2, 13.7.2, 13.14.2.

47. CNis 14.4.2 and 14.24.

48. CNis 14.15.2, 14.16.2, 14.13.2, 14.2.2. Martikainen concludes on the basis of the references to Babu in the CNis that conditions of social, economic and legal collapse prevailed during his episcopacy, cf. Martikainen, *Remarks*, 351.

INTRODUCTION

Emperor Constantius stationed a larger army in Mesopotamia and personally visited the fortresses to add force to Roman claims to the area.⁴⁹ Yet his preoccupation with difficulties in the West allowed Shapur to make inroads into the area, besieging Nisibis for three months in 346 and again for four months in 350.⁵⁰

In his *Carmina Nisibena* Ephrem contemplated all three sieges of his native city, but it was the third siege that fascinated him, as it did the future Emperor Julian and Ammianus Marcellinus.⁵¹ This siege was marked by Shapur's bold attempt to undermine the city's fortifications by diverting the River Mygdonius to engulf them. Although he succeeded in breaching the wall, the intrepid Nisibenes quickly rebuilt it, while Shapur's elephants, under attack from insects, floundered in mud. Whereas their valiant efforts inspired Julian to Homeric comparisons,⁵² Ephrem was reminded of Noah's ark as well as of the resurrection of Christ after three days in the tomb:

[Nisibis speaks]

Hear and weigh my likeness with Noah,
and since my pain is less than his,
may Your grace be equal to our salvation,
for my children stand like Noah
between the wrathful and the destroyers.
Make peace, my Lord, with the besieged,
and cast down before me the besiegers,
to double my victory.
Since the killer three times [expressed] his anger,
[express] three times the mercy of Your Third One.
Grant not victory over Your beloved to the Evil One
whose avarice You [defeated] twice and three times.
Allow my victory to fly over the whole world
to acquire glory for You in the whole world.

49. Constantius came to Edessa in 340, to Nisibis in May 345, stationed the army at Edessa in the summer of 346, and visited Hierapolis in 347; cf. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 27 and RE ser. I, v. 4, col. 1055, 1060f.

50. Ibid. 1060, 1063f. A major battle fought at Singara in 348 was a significant victory for Rome, but the truce concluded was immediately broken by Shapur; ibid. 1061f.

51. Jul. Imp. Orat. 1.27B–28D, Orat. 2, 62B–67A, and Amm. Mar. 25.8.13f. Later hagiographers also contributed their descriptions of the famous siege, cf. Peeters, *Legende*, 300f.

52. Jul. Imp. Orat. 2, 67A–73C.

INTRODUCTION

O He Who was revived the third [day],
put me not to death in the third [trial]!⁵³

This dramatic incident inspired in the hymnodist not only the discernment of these intricate typological patterns but also a pure paean to faith and grace:

He saved us without a wall and taught that He is our wall.
He saved us without a king and made known that He is our king.
He saved us in all from all and showed He is all.
He saved us by His grace and again revealed
that He is freely gracious and life-giving. From each who boasts
He takes away the boast and gives to him His grace.⁵⁴

D Ephrem's Last Years in Nisibis: 350–63

When Shapur abandoned the siege in the fall of 350 to attend to troubles farther east near the Caspian Sea, the Armenians re-allied themselves with Rome while the Nisibenes celebrated the freeing of their city and began the task of restoring her to her former status as queen of Mesopotamia. Apparently Bishop Babu did not live to enjoy the happier decade that followed. His successor, Vologeses, constructed the city's first baptistery in 359.⁵⁵ At this time as well, Ephrem looked back over the previous history of the city and wrote his hymns characterizing the first three episcopacies as three phases in the growth of the Christian city: childhood, adolescence and adulthood. He portrays each of the three prelates, Jacob, Babu and Vologeses, as uniquely suited to the ruling of the Christian community at the time appointed. Whereas the first two bishops administered a combination of love and discipline appropriate to childhood and youth, Vologeses' gentleness and humility are better suited to the mature community he shepherded.⁵⁶ Despite the fact that heresies,

53. CNis 1.11; cf. also CNis 3.11–12. On Christ as the "third" one, cf. Beck's remarks *ad loc.*

54. CNis 2.2.

55. On the building, its inscription and sculptures, cf. Fiey, *Nisibe*, 29f.

56. Cf. CNis 14.17–19, 15.13–20, and 16.6–22.

INTRODUCTION

especially Arianism, divided the Nisibene Christians, Ephrem defended his bishop against critics who demanded a more severe approach.⁵⁷

Within a decade Shapur had restored his position in the East and turned his attention once again to Armenia and Mesopotamia. Negotiations had come to a halt when Shapur's determination to recover his "forefathers' empire" encountered Constantius' insistence that it would be "absurd and silly to surrender what we have long preserved unmolested."⁵⁸ In 359 Shapur "armed with the help of savage tribes which he had subdued, and burning with superhuman desire of extending his domain, was preparing arms, forces, and supplies, embroiling his plans with infernal powers and consulting all superstitions about the future. . . . He planned with the first mildness of spring to overrun everything."⁵⁹ A combination of betrayal and ill-preparedness led the Romans to destroy the north Mesopotamian countryside to deprive Shapur of fodder during the anticipated invasion.⁶⁰ Ephrem portrays the city seeking divine assistance on behalf of the population both within and without her walls:

My Lord, my children have fled like chicks
pursued by an eagle. They are hidden in a refuge!
Let Your Peace return to them!⁶¹

I have lifted up my eyes to all the squares; they are deserted.
Ten are left from a hundred and a thousand from ten thousand.
Grant peace, let the clamor of my inhabitants fill my squares.
Return those outside and make those inside rejoice.
Great enough is Your grace to extend inside and outside.
Let the wings of Your grace gather my chicks.
Let the prayer of my just ones preserve my fleeing ones.
The unbelievers broke me, but the believers sustained me.
By the believers deprive the unbelievers!⁶²

57. Cf. CNis 15.1–4, but, citing CNis 7.9–13, Fiey suggests the malcontents were the heretics themselves, probably Arians, cf. Fiey, Nisibe, 31f.

58. Amm. Mar. 17.5.1–15.

59. Amm. Mar. 18.4.1.

60. Amm. Mar. 18.4–7.

61. CNis 4.23.

62. CNis 6.27–29. Further cf. CNis 4–7 *passim*.

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 359 the Persian army arrived in Mesopotamia. Bypassing Nisibis, Shapur first attempted to strike more deeply into Roman territory while Constantius was occupied in Gaul. Frustrated in this attempt, he turned back to fight the Roman army in Mesopotamia and to attempt once more the capture of the major fortresses there. When he had besieged and captured Amida, Shapur ordered all its citizens to be killed or enslaved as punishment for their refusal to surrender and for their provocative behavior.⁶³ After wintering across the Tigris, Shapur returned, captured Singara and deported its people.⁶⁴ Again bypassing Nisibis, guarded by the Roman army, he besieged and captured Bezabde, slaughtered its inhabitants and rebuilt its fortifications.⁶⁵ At last Constantius arrived. Having passed through Edessa and mourned over the ashes of Amida, he attempted to retake Bezabde but abandoned the enterprise as winter approached.⁶⁶

The emperor's defense of Roman Mesopotamia was hampered by the refusal of his Gallic troops to come to his aid in the East and their acclamation instead of the young Caesar Julian as a rival Augustus. While Shapur and Constantius faced off across Mesopotamia in the spring of 361, Julian openly stepped forth as a rival augustus. As he set out against his rebellious cousin, Constantius died, thus leaving the way clear for the young apostate emperor to define his own policies. Initially content to promote the public practice of pagan religions and to defend its intellectual integrity, Julian expected that internecine rivalry among Christians would suffice to undermine the church. In time, however, his measures became more directly anti-Christian. These developments coincide more or less with his movement toward the East. Arriving at Antioch in 362, Julian engaged in a prolonged struggle with its population over religious and social mores as he attempted to impose his ascetic and philosophically-interpreted version of paganism on the city. The emperor's religious policies were closely related to his Persian military campaign.⁶⁷ Like most of his contemporaries, including Ephrem, Julian believed that military victory would go to those who had offered suitable worship to the correct God or gods. Much of his time in Antioch had been spent in the offering of sacrifices and the consultation

63. Amm. Mar. 19.8.

64. Amm. Mar. 20.6.7.

65. Amm. Mar. 20.6.9, 20.7.15.

66. Amm. Mar. 20.11.

67. Cf. Amm. Mar. 22 and 23.

INTRODUCTION

of oracles and auguries.⁶⁸ At the outset of his Mesopotamian campaign, he stopped at Harran to worship its celestial deities.⁶⁹ While in Constantinople in the spring of 362, Julian had hastily composed a hymn to the Great Mother of the gods, in which he displayed his strongly neo-Platonic interpretation of her cult, and he had visited her shrine at Pessinus en route from Constantinople to Antioch.⁷⁰ Now he led his army to Hierapolis, the Mesopotamian city particularly identified with her cult in its syncretistic form, Cybele having been identified with the Semitic Atargatis-Anahitha-Astarte as well as the Greek Hera.⁷¹ Finally, Julian paused in his march down the Euphrates to celebrate her feast on March 27.⁷² Ephrem recorded the emperor's celebration with angry disgust:

Agreeable to him was the feast of the detestable idol
on whose feast-day women and men rave,
virgins fornicate and wives become lascivious,
vomit out [and] speak words of shame.⁷³

As a part of his program of restoration of traditional temples, and possibly also as an anti-Christian measure, Julian had undertaken to rebuild the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.⁷⁴ At about the same time he had issued a new coin displaying the image of a bull with two stars. From Ephrem's perspective these two measures were linked not only to each other but also to the emperor's general promotion of paganism:

Perhaps because of that money on which the bull was portrayed,
the Jews were overjoyed that [Julian] carried it in his heart
and also in his purse and in his hand
as a type of that calf of the wilderness

68. Cf. esp. Amm. Mar. 22.12.6–13.

69. Amm. Mar. 23.3, cf. Bowersock, Julian, 109, and Segal, Edessa, 104f.

70. For the hymn, cf. Jul. Imp. Orat. 5, Bowersock, Julian 82f. and Malley, Hellenism, 65–67 et passim. For the visits to Pessinus cf. Amm. Mar. 22.9.5.

71. The most important source on her cult at Hierapolis is Lucian's satire, cf. Luc. Sam. de Syr. Dea; it is discussed by Segal, Edessa, 46–48 and Drijvers, Cults, 76–121. Although he mentions Julian's visit to Hierapolis, Ammianus does not mention any religious devotions conducted there, Amm. Mar. 23.2.6.

72. The visit to Hierapolis was 5 March, Amm. Mar. 23.2.6, celebration of the feast, Amm. Mar. 23.3.1.

73. CJ 2.6.1–4.

74. On the rebuilding as anti-Christian propaganda, cf. Wilken, Chrysostom, esp. 130–48.

INTRODUCTION

that was before his eye and heart and mind;
and probably in his dreams he used to see the calf!⁷⁵

At the same time Julian's attitude toward the Christians of Mesopotamia had worsened. He had pointedly refrained from visiting Edessa, well-known by this time as a center of Christianity. In a letter sent from Antioch he had ironically informed the Christian citizens of his intention to confiscate their property to help them to conform more closely to the ascetic ideal of their religion.⁷⁶ Ephrem claims further that Julian sent a threatening letter to the Christians of Mesopotamia, or perhaps of Nisibis itself:

For he foretold and promised and wrote and sent to us
that he would come down and trample it; Persia he would disperse.
Singara he would rebuild. [This was] the threat of his letter.⁷⁷

The poet responded with a hymn of encouragement to the Christians of Nisibis to persevere under conditions of duress, following the example of Elijah and Daniel in rebuking idolatrous rulers.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, an idol was set up in the city with an accompanying public cult, and the Christians of Nisibis did nothing to eliminate it.⁷⁹

Julian's choice of a route through Roman Mesopotamia was not dictated solely by religious motives, however. After feigning an intent to proceed across the north to Adiabene, he abruptly changed direction and, taking part of his troops with his navy, proceeded boldly down the Euphrates directly toward the Persian capital, Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Shapur meanwhile followed a tactic of withdrawal, allowing the Romans to penetrate into Persian territory so that retreat would be difficult in the event that they overextended their campaign. This Julian did. He found himself at the gates of the Persian capital without the forces to take the city. Shapur's army was lying in wait just to the east; the Roman reinforcements had not yet arrived from the north. Following the advice of a

75. CJ 1.19, cf. also CJ 1.16–18.

76. Jul. Imp. Letter 115, cf. Bowersock, Julian, 92.

77. CJ 2.15.

78. HdEccl. 1.

79. CJ 2.20–22. Since a variety of pagan cults had remained in existence there, the particularly offensive character of this cult for Ephrem must have been the public imperial endorsement of paganism after two generations of rule by Christian emperors.

INTRODUCTION

supposed traitor, who was in fact a Persian agent, Julian destroyed his own fleet. Then, as he retreated through Mesopotamia with the Sassanid forces destroying the crops in his path, he was killed in battle. In Ephrem's view Julian's death was virtually a suicide in the face of a hopeless situation:

When he saw that his gods were confuted and exposed
and that he could neither gain victory nor flee,
[that] between fear and disgrace he was prostrate and beaten,
cunningly he stripped off his armor in order to be wounded,
in order to die so that the Galileans would not see his shame.⁸⁰

Sometime during all these upheavals, Vologeses, the bishop of Nisibis, had died and had been succeeded by a much younger man, his protégé Abraham. Ephrem composed several hymns, including one upon the new bishop's installation, filled with advice. Now in his fifties, the hymnodist had not only passed from childhood to adulthood with respect to his bishops, he was now ready to assume the role of the wise parent.⁸¹ In addition to the advice that he be firm and imitate his worthy predecessors, Ephrem adds the hope that the episcopal power will work effectively with the imperial power. For after the death of Julian, the Roman army had chosen a new emperor, Jovian, an orthodox Christian.

Seeing no alternative to surrender under the disadvantageous terms offered him by Shapur, Jovian accepted them. These terms included cession to Persia of the city of Nisibis without its inhabitants. The city was, in Ephrem's eyes, the sacrificial lamb that saved the Roman army.⁸² Unlike Ammianus Marcellinus, however, who portrays the fate of Nisibis in exclusively negative terms,⁸³ Ephrem stresses that, although the city itself was ceded to Persia, the Persian ruler showed respect for its Christian churches and permitted its citizens to depart for Roman territory rather than executing them, enslaving them or exiling them into the eastern reaches of the Persian Empire, as had been the fate of the inhabitants of other recalcitrant Mesopotamian cities.⁸⁴ To celebrate his victory

80. CJ 3.16; cf. note ad loc.

81. Cf. CNis 17.

82. Cf. CJ 2.15.6.

83. Cf. Amm. Mar. 25.7.11, 25.8.13–14, 25.8.17, 25.9.1–12.

84. Cf. CJ 2.22–27.

INTRODUCTION

and show appropriate disdain for the religion of the Roman army that had attacked his empire, the Persian king was apparently satisfied to destroy the pagan temples associated specifically with Julian.⁸⁵

Still the entire Christian population of this fortress city migrated within a short time to the adjacent cities of the Roman Empire. Ephrem was among those who went first to Amida, then to Edessa, where he would spend his last ten years. Thus the heroic struggle of his native city, a symbol of Rome and of Christianity, against the mighty Persian Empire, a struggle which had occupied most of his adult life, ended in defeat and disgrace. The “constant, unwearying herald” was surrendered to the Persians.⁸⁶ As he meditates on these events in his *Carmina Nisibena* and in his *Hymns against Julian*, Ephrem shows himself to be a genuine heir to the Jewish prophetic tradition, interpreting historical events as directed by divine Providence toward the attainment of justice in this world.⁸⁷ There must be a reason for God’s allowing Nisibis to be taken. For him that reason is clear: the apostasy of the Christian Roman emperor and of those who followed him in reinstating pagan worship:

Who else has so multiplied altars?
Who else has so honored all the evil spirits?
Who else has so pleased all the demons?
He angered only the One, and he was broken.
In him was confuted the entire faction of wrong,
a force unable to support its worshippers!⁸⁸

E Ephrem at Edessa: 363–73

Ephrem arrived in Edessa in 363 to find a city that retained much of its unique cultural and religious heritage.⁸⁹ The city had been ruled by a dynasty of Nabatean kings who had deftly navigated the political strug-

85. CJ 2.22.

86. CJ 2.16.6.

87. Martikainen, Remarks. The Babylonian Jewish community, by contrast, was alienated from this tradition of historical interpretation, according to Neusner: “It is as if the biblical genius at interpreting the theological substance of historical forms had been lost, or abandoned so the rabbis no longer seriously cared about history” (TJSB, 39).

88. CJ 4.6.

89. The lost Nisibene Hymns, 22–25, probably deal with the period of Ephrem’s journey from Nisibis to Edessa via Amida; cf. Beck, Lobgesang, 15.

INTRODUCTION

gles of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods until it was incorporated into the Roman Empire in the early third century.⁹⁰ Like Nisibis, Edessa had been the object of the Roman struggles with Parthia, Sassanid Persia and Palmyra and had been definitively recovered for Rome by Diocletian. Likewise as at Nisibis, the population, its culture and religion were mixed. Pagan worship of several varieties is clearly attested: From the ancient Mesopotamian pantheon, Bel and Nebo are found, often associated as father and son. Bel is Bel Marduk, the chief god of Babylonian religion, “kosmokrator, lord of planets and stars who guided the world and gave it fertility.”⁹¹ From his function as cosmic ruler, astrology had come to be associated with Bel. A major New Year’s festival, which took place in his honor in April, continued to flourish. Nebo, son of Bel, was the “Babylonian god of wisdom and human fate,” who had become the patron of wisdom and of the art of writing as well as a powerful mediator between his father and humankind.⁹² From the native Aramean culture came Hadad, Baal Shamin, lord of the heavens in the sense of master of the weather, storms, rain and fertility, who was symbolized by both the bull and the eagle. His consort, Atargatis, a female fertility goddess associated with fish and water, had surpassed him in importance in the Hellenistic and Roman periods when she had acquired the characteristics of Cybele, the Great Mother of Asia Minor. Her cult, as described by Lucian of Samosata in *On the Syrian Goddess*, with its castrated priests, the *galli*, and raucous musical processions, was centered at neighboring Hierapolis. It was clearly important at Edessa as well, where large ponds containing sacred fish were associated with her worship.⁹³ The moon god, Sin, and the Arabian deities, Azizos and Monimos, received homage here.⁹⁴ Also clearly attested is the presence of a substantial and prosperous Jewish community associated with the silk trade and with their co-religionists in Nisibis.⁹⁵

90. Segal, Edessa, 13–16.

91. Drijvers, Persistence, 37; cf. also idem, Cults, 40–75; but some of Bel’s functions may have been taken over from Bol, a local Semitic deity, cf. J. Starcky, *Palmyréniens, Nabatéens et Arabes du Nord avant l’Islam*, in *Histoire des Religions* 4, ed. M. Brillant and R. Aigrain (Tournai, Belgium, 1957), 206.

92. Drijvers, Persistence, 37; cf. also J. Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1979), 107.

93. Segal, Edessa, 46–49; Drijvers, Cults, 76–121.

94. Drijvers, Cults, 122–74.

95. Segal, Edessa, 41–43, 100–2, 108–9, 136f.; cf. also Drijvers, Jews.

INTRODUCTION

Fourth-century Edessa was a proud center of Christianity with legends and associations sufficient to capture the imaginations of such Western Christians as Eusebius and Egeria.⁹⁶ According to the *Doctrine of Addai*, an early version of which Eusebius had read in the city's archives, Jesus himself had corresponded with King Abgar of Edessa. In response to the king's recognition of his messianic role and his offer of refuge, Jesus had assured him that an apostle would be sent to teach him and to heal him of an illness. By the end of the fourth century it was held that Jesus' letter had the capacity to protect the city, and that Jesus had also sent his portrait to Abgar, and within a few more decades that portrait was proudly functioning as the palladium of the city.⁹⁷ Although the non-canonical *Acts of Thomas* associate their protagonist not with Edessa, but with India, both they and the gospel attributed to him may have originated in Edessa.⁹⁸ Although the *Doctrine of Addai* claims only that Addai, or Thaddeus, one of the seventy, was sent to the city by the apostle Thomas, by Ephrem's time the bones of Thomas himself were venerated there. Aware of a conflict between this development and the tradition of the apostle's death in India according to the *Acts of Thomas*, the hymnodist alludes to a transferral of the bones:

The evil one wails, "Where then
can I flee from the righteous?
I incited Death to kill the apostles
as if to escape from their scourges
by their death. More than ever now
I am scourged harshly. The apostle I killed in India
[has come] to Edessa before me. Here is he and also there.
I went there, there he is.
Here and there I found him, and I am gloomy.
Did that merchant carry the bones?
Or perhaps, indeed, they carried him!"⁹⁹

96. Cf. Euseb. HE 1.13 and Eger. Itin. 17–19.

97. The essential work on the legend and its development is E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur Christlicher Legende*, TU, ser. 2, III (Leipzig, 1899); for the argument that Egeria's is the original version, cf. P. Devos, "Égérie à Édesse. S. Thomas L'Apôtre: Le Roi Abgar," AB 85 (1967), 381–400; also, cf. Cameron, Shroud.

98. Cf. nn. 13 and 28 above.

99. CNis 42.1.1–2.2 and cf. CNis 27.62 and 49.9–40; vs. Acta Thomae 1–2 and 159–170.

INTRODUCTION

A decade or two later Egeria would come to the Syrian city expressly to see the martyrdom of Thomas, whom she believed to be the apostle sent to Abgar by Jesus.¹⁰⁰

In addition to their claim to apostolic foundation and royal endorsement, the Christians of Edessa could lay claim to most of the earliest Syriac literature.¹⁰¹ The first Syriac author whose name has been preserved, Bardaisan composed his one hundred fifty hymns there in the second century. His work consists of a unique blend of ideas and imagery drawn from Christianity, Aramaean paganism, astrology and later Platonism.¹⁰² Bardaisan was the originator of the *madrāšâ*, a hymn composed in isosyllabic verse, which uses parallelism, rhyme, alliteration and a variety of word play to achieve its effects.¹⁰³ Composing hymns in the same form to combat the heretic's views, Ephrem became the unquestioned master of the genre.¹⁰⁴

Edessa also had its Diocletianic martyrs, Shamona, Gurya and Habbib, as well as less reliable legends of earlier martyrs.¹⁰⁵ Despite its early apostolic traditions, its literature and martyrs, the city's succession of bishops is problematic until 313, when Bishop Qona is said to have undertaken the construction of a new cathedral church, just coinciding with the new status of the church under Constantine.¹⁰⁶ The city was also

100. Eger. Itin. 17.1; cf. Devos, Egerie, 381f.

101. For enumeration of the works to be included under this rubric, their characteristic features and problems involved in their interpretation, cf. Murray, Characteristics; further, cf. n. 13, above.

102. For a general introduction to Bardaisan, cf. Drijvers, Bardaisan of Edessa; for additional bibliography, cf. Kronholm, Motifs, 29, n.99, and add Drijvers, "Bardaisan of Edessa and the Hermetica: The Aramaic Philosopher and the Philosophy of His Time," *Jaarbericht Ex Oriente Lux* 21 (1969-70), 190-210.

103. Although Ephrem mentions only Bardaisan himself, Sozomen credits his putative son Harmonius with the invention of the genre; cf. Outtier 21. The Greek and overly appropriate name of Harmonious coupled with the prevalent chauvinism of Greek Christian writers have made some suspicious of this datum. Yet it is difficult to see why the hagiographic tradition surrounding Ephrem would maintain Bardaisan's priority here without reason. On this question and on Syriac poetic forms in brief, cf. Brock, Introduction, esp. 5-6.

104. For a careful analysis of Ephrem's poetic technique, cf. S. Brock, "The Poetic Artistry of St. Ephrem: An Analysis of H. Azym. III," *PdO* 6 (1975), 21-28; also, P. Robson, "Ephrem as Poet," in J.H. Eaton, *Horizons*, 34-38, analyzes a short section from the first two Hymns against Julian.

105. For the text and translation of the acts of Shamona and Gurya, cf. F. C. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth with the Acts of Martyrdom of the Confessors of Edessa* (London, 1913); on their authenticity, cf. H. Achelis, *Die Martyrologien*, Abh. der Gesellschaft der Wiss. zu Göttingen, 3.3 (1900), 30-71; for a general discussion, cf. Segal, Edessa, 82-86.

106. Bauer, Orthodoxy, esp. 14-43.

INTRODUCTION

represented at the Council of Nicea.¹⁰⁷ Even more clearly than in the case of Nisibis, however, the concept of orthodoxy was of more recent vintage than the presence of a Christian community. For when Ephrem arrived in 363 C.E. he found a city in which the orthodox were identified by the name of a predecessor of Qona, Palut, who had been ordained by the bishop of Antioch. Likewise the Marcionites, Bardaisanites, Manichaeans, Arians and all other Christians were identified by the epithet of their group to distinguish them among the larger group of Christians.¹⁰⁸ Such identifications could not be accepted by orthodox Christians, Ephrem argued. They and they alone had the right to be called by the name of Christ. Just as the image of the emperor for the manufacture of coins is strictly controlled, so is the image of the Lord not to be used by just anybody. Indeed, all the heretics should be designated by the names of their founders, but orthodox should be known simply as "Christians," not as "Palutians."¹⁰⁹

Clearly the Gnostic and Manichaean forms of Christianity, and Arianism as well, had substantial followings in Edessa, and just as in Nisibis Ephrem did not hesitate to enter the polemical fray. Many of his *Hymns against Heresies*, composed in Nisibis, were refutations of the doctrines of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan; in his new home he supplemented these polemics with more hymns as well as prose refutations.¹¹⁰ Likewise Ephrem had already written his *Sermons on Faith* against Arianism in Nisibis, but this struggle assumed a larger role in his Edessene period.¹¹¹ In the later historical *Carmina Nisibena* and in the *Hymns on Faith*, he

107. Although the lists of signatories include a bishop of Edessa, the name varies; cf. Honigsmann, *Liste*, p. 46 #73 Aethalas of Edessa and p. 62 #73 Abšelma of Urha (Edessa), and Honigsmann's *Remarks* p. 63.

108. We cannot discuss fully the complex question whether Bauer has demonstrated that the Marcionites of Edessa were known simply by the name of Christian, cf. Bauer, *Orthodoxy*, 22–29. Suffice it to say that Ephrem does not so state in the passages Bauer cites, and that his discussion needs to be evaluated in the light of a full analysis of Ephrem's polemical works; for a useful overview of the polemical works, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 28–33.

109. CH 22, esp. 22.1–10.

110. Although Kronholm ascribes the *Hymns against Heresies* "in all probability" to the Nisibene period, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 20, surely CH 22–24, with the clear references to Palut in 22.5–6, come from the Edessene period. Beck has not, I think, expressed a view on the dating of that collection. His remarks on the philosophical arguments in the prose refutations suggest the later period, cf. Eph. *Hypat.*, esp. 119f., n. 135, and Eph. *Domnus*, esp. 67f.

111. For dating of the *SdF*, cf. Beck, *Lobgesang*, 17.

INTRODUCTION

defends not only the orthodox doctrine but also the anti-Arian bishops, Barsai and Vitus of Harran, against the machinations of their episcopal and imperial opponents.¹¹² In a less polemical vein are the collections entitled *Hymns on the Church* and *Hymns on Virginity*, which set forth most fully his symbolic theology in the context of scriptural interpretation and ecclesiology.¹¹³ As at Nisibis Ephrem probably taught in a school, perhaps one he himself founded.¹¹⁴ Here, too, Ephrem is said to have founded choirs of women whom he personally instructed in the singing of his hymns.¹¹⁵ Ephrem's admiration of the ascetic life and his enthusiasm for Christian virginity are evident throughout his writings in his descriptions of bishops he admired as well as in more general treatments.¹¹⁶ There is no indication, however, in the clearly authentic writings that he personally embraced the monastic life either as a hermit or as a member of a community.¹¹⁷ Ephrem was ordained to the diaconate at Edessa, and in the course of caring for the sick in an outbreak of the plague, he died there on 9 June 373 C.E.¹¹⁸

112. Cf. CNis 26–34, esp. 26–27, and Beck, Lobgesang 15. For the dating and contents of the HdF, cf. Beck, Theologie; also Beck, Lobgesang, 15, and Kronholm, Motifs, 28, n.95. As Griffith has argued at length, however, for Ephrem it is the bishops, rather than the emperors who bear the major responsibility for these problems, cf. Griffith, Ephraem, esp. 37–47.

113. On the basis of Virg. 37.10, the similarity of themes in the two collections, and their fully developed symbolic theology, Beck places them late in Ephrem's life; cf. Beck, Lobgesang, 16.

114. Barhadbshabba claims Ephrem as the founder of this school, just as he claimed his appointment by Jacob of Nisibis as the beginning of that school; cf. n. 24 above, *loc. cit.* Hayes' view that Ephrem taught in an institution that antedated his arrival in Edessa is based on the unsubstantiated presumption that "partout où le christianisme prenait pied, on créait une école pour l'instruction de la jeunesse et pour celle des clercs." Cf. E. R. Hayes *L'École d'Édesse* (Paris, 1930), 39–40. Whereas Vööbus is sceptical of both claims, cf. *History of the School of Nisibis*, CSCO subs. p.9, Outtier credits Barhadbshabba, cf. Outtier, Saint Ephrem, 20f., 25f.

115. Jacob of Serug's homily on Ephrem is the source of this notion, cf. P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et Sanctorum Syriace*, 6 vols. (Paris-Leipzig, 1892; rep. Hildesheim, 1968), 3, 665–78; again, Outtier finds it creditable, *loc. cit.*

116. Cf. for example CNis 26–34, on the one hand, and de Virg 1–3, on the other.

117. Kronholm, Motifs, 24f., nn. 65f. and 70f., for the literature, and add Outtier, Saint Ephrem, 14–16.

118. The most important testimony to his ordination is Ephrem's own, cf. CH 56.10; Palladius, Jerome and Sozomen also refer to him as a deacon; the Chronicle of Edessa is the source for the date of his death, and Palladius and Sozomen for his service in the plague; cf. Outtier, Saint Ephrem, esp. 14f. and 19.

INTRODUCTION

III Hymns Chosen for This Volume

A The Hymns on the Nativity

1 The Manuscript Collections

The core of the collection of *Hymns on the Nativity* is a collection of sixteen hymns (Hymns 5–20 of the present translation), probably gathered together and entitled “lullabyes” by Ephrem himself.¹¹⁹ The designation is appropriate since most of the hymns are sung by Mary to her son. Ephrem probably composed the collection of hymns for liturgical use at the feast of Christ’s birth and manifestation to the world, celebrated in his time on 6 January.¹²⁰

A sixth-century compiler of Ephrem’s hymns supplemented this collection with four authentic hymns on the same subject (hymns 1–4 of the present translation).¹²¹ In the manuscript collections of Ephrem’s hymns subsequently made for liturgical use, the sixth-century collection of twenty hymns is supplemented with eight more on the birth of Christ. All except the last of these additional hymns (hymns 21–27 of the present translation) are surely authentic; even the last hymn (hymn 28) is probably a later compilation of strophes from authentic hymns.¹²² The entire collection, therefore, has been included in the present translation. Many of the Nativity Hymns have appeared previously in English, but this is the first English translation of the full collection of twenty-eight hymns based on Beck’s edition.¹²³

119. Hymns 5–20 of the present collection all have the same melody and are grouped under the title “Hymns on the Nativity” in the oldest manuscript, BM Add 14571; the second-oldest manuscript, Vat. Syr. 112, dated 551 A.D., adds the designation *newrt’* for this core group and supplements it with hymns 1–4; cf. E. Beck, in CSCO 187, v. Further on the development of the collection, cf. A. de Halleux, “La transmission des Hymnes d’Éphrem d’après les ms. Sinai Syr. 10, f. 165v–178r.,” OCA 197 (1974), 21–63, esp. 38f.

120. Cf. Nat. 5.13–14 and Beck, CSCO 186, v–vi.

121. Contrary to the view expressed in Kronholm (in *Motifs*, 21), Beck considers these four unquestionably authentic, cf. Beck, CSCO 187, v–vi.

122. The manuscripts in question date from the eighth to thirteenth centuries. For the detailed discussion of the authenticity of Nat. 21–28, cf. Beck, CSCO 187, v–viii.

123. An excellent translation of Nat. 11 appears in Brock, *Harp*, 34–36. An earlier version of thirteen hymns based on the edition of Assemani was published by J. B. Morris, *Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford, 1847), 1–60; it was supplemented by J. Gwynn with six additional hymns from Lamy’s edition (hymns 21–26 of the present translation) and republished in NPNF XIII, 221–62. Hymns 2, 12, 19, 20, 27 and 28 appear here for the first time in English. In the rest of the collection many lesser changes in translation and arrangement have been made thanks to Beck’s edition.

INTRODUCTION

Later the Syriac church brought its celebration of the nativity into conformity with the Roman tradition, celebrating Christmas on 25 December and the Epiphany on 6 January. The latter date, now understood as the feast of the baptism of Christ, became the occasion for the baptism of catechumens.¹²⁴ In conformity with this later tradition the liturgical manuscripts add a collection of *Hymns on the Epiphany*, which concern the sacrament of baptism. Although several of the *Hymns on Epiphany* are genuinely Ephrem's work, they are not included here since they were not linked with the Nativity Hymns in Ephrem's time.¹²⁵ Given the limitations of space I preferred to present other texts which have not been previously translated into English.¹²⁶

2 Theological and Literary Themes of the *Hymns on the Nativity*

The central theological theme of the *Hymns on the Nativity* is Ephrem's understanding of the incarnation as the miraculous and paradoxical self-abasement of God out of love for humankind. It is a theological concept that evokes profound questions: How can the Ruler of the universe, whom the entire created order is unable to contain, have been contained in a single, small human womb?

The Power that governs all dwelt in a small womb.
While dwelling there, He was holding the reins of the universe.
His Parent was ready for His will to be fulfilled.
The heavens and all the creation were filled by Him.
The Sun entered the womb, and in the height and depth
His rays were dwelling.

He dwelt in the vast wombs of all creation.
They were too small to contain the greatness of the Firstborn.
How indeed did that small womb of Mary suffice for Him?
It is a wonder if [anything] sufficed for Him.

124. In conformity with the rest of the early church, the Syriac church of Ephrem's time had baptized catechumens at Easter. That this was the custom in Ephrem's time is confirmed by Virg 7 as well as by Aphrahat, Dem. 12 and 13, cf. Beck, CSCO 186, v ff., 187, vi ff.

125. For a more extensive discussion of the authenticity of the Epiphany Hymns and of the *swgyt'* also appended to the later manuscripts, cf. Beck, CSCO 186, vii-viii, 187, viii-xiii.

126. The Epiphany Hymns were translated by A. E. Johnston, in NPNF ser. 2, XIII, 265-89.

INTRODUCTION

Of all the wombs that contained Him, one womb sufficed:
[the womb] of the Great One Who begot Him.

The womb that contained Him, if it contained all of Him,
is equal to the wonderful womb
that is greater than [the womb] of His birth.
But who will dare to say that a small womb,
weak and despised, is equal to [the womb] of the Great Being.
He dwelt [there] because of His compassion,
and since His nature is great,
He was not limited in anything.¹²⁷

Not only the bare fact of the incarnation but also of its specific circumstances are miraculous and paradoxical: “[God] deprived the married womb; He made fruitful the virgin womb.”¹²⁸ Far from showing a weakness, these apparent contradictions show the majesty of the Creator, the “Lord of natures.” Yet these are not pointless displays of might; instead they are the concessions of a loving God to human frailty:

God had seen that we worshipped creatures.
He put on a created body to catch us by our habit.
Behold by this fashioned one our Fashioner healed us,
and by this creature our Creator revived us.¹²⁹

The divine condescension to humankind in the incarnation has brought about a permanent change in the relationship between human beings and their Creator:

the Deity imprinted Itself on humanity, so that humanity might
also be cut into the seal of the Deity.¹³⁰

In addition to this language of seals and stamps, which he shares with the Logos theology of Greek Christianity, Ephrem expresses the intimate union of divine and human with the language of painting, likening it to the artist's blending of pigments:

127. Nat. 21.6–8.

128. Nat. 21.17.

129. Nat. 21.12; cf. Nat. 22.4 and 22.16–18.

130. Nat. 1.99.

INTRODUCTION

Glorious is the Wise One Who allied and joined
Divinity with humanity,
One from the height and the other from below.
He mingled the natures like pigments,
and an image came into being: the God-man!¹³¹

Although this grand concession to human frailty took place uniquely in the incarnation, it also continues to take place in every time and place for each individual human being. God is revealed to each according to his or her capacity to perceive:

He was cheerful among the infants as a baby;
awesome was He among the Watchers as a commander.
Too awesome was He for John to loosen His sandals;
accessible was He for sinners who kissed His feet.
The Watchers as Watchers saw Him;
according to the degree of his knowledge each person saw Him.
Everyone according to the measure of his discernment thus perceived Him, that One greater than all.¹³²

These hymns are also an extraordinarily rich source of early Christian typological exegesis. In conformity with the incarnational emphasis of the hymns, the central figures of this typology are Jesus and Mary. Especially in the first two hymns Ephrem presents a rich variety of Old Testament types for Christ. In the second hymn he systematically presents Jesus as the prophet, priest and king. Throughout the hymns he uses many of the usual Old Testament figures as forerunners of Christ, but he adds unexpected interpretations as well. For example, Jesus is anticipated not only by Isaac, Melchizedek, Moses and David, but also by Jacob, who is kicked by Esau but does not retaliate. Above all, the wealth of his typology for Mary sets Ephrem's effort apart from the other early Christian examples of typological exegesis. Mary is not only the second Eve, but she is also a second Sarah, Rachel and Anna; she is even compared

131. Nat. 8.2, cf. also Nat. 21.12.5–6. For the same imagery vis-à-vis baptism, cf. Virg. 7.5–6, and for a radical mingling of the natures without the painting imagery, Virg. 37.2.

132. Nat. 4.197–200. On "Watchers" cf. CJ 1.8.3–6 and note *ad loc.*

INTRODUCTION

with Tamar, Ruth and Rahab.¹³³ Indeed she is the Tablet of the Law and the Ark of the Covenant.¹³⁴

Ephrem's choice of types for Mary and his argument on her behalf are motivated in part by a desire to defend the virgin birth from criticism or ridicule. In the sixth hymn Mary sings to her infant son:

. . . With Your pure conception
evil men have slandered me. O Holy One,
be Your mother's defender. Show miracles
to convince them whence is Your conception.¹³⁵

In response Ephrem has crafted an intricate typology of sealed tombs and sealed wombs:

Sealed was the grave which they entrusted
with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb
that no man knew. The virginal womb
and the sealed grave like trumpets
for a deaf people, shouted in its ear.¹³⁶

Ephrem adds a menacing dimension to his typology directed at the Jewish authorities to whom he attributes the attacks on Mary's virtue.¹³⁷ Just as the daughter of Saul was punished for her criticism and ridicule of David's dance, so also the "daughter of Sion" will be punished if these attacks do not cease.¹³⁸

Despite the polemical overtones of these hymns, their mariology has important positive dimensions as well. Ephrem's mariology is central to his understanding of the incarnation. Mary was chosen because she was most pleasing to God.¹³⁹ Yet she who gave birth to the Son of the Most High was given birth by him in baptism.¹⁴⁰ Paradoxically, Mary gave

133. Cf. Nat. 8. 13, 13. 2-5; 9. 7-16, 15.8, 16.12.

134. Cf. Nat. 16.16-17.

135. Nat. 6.3.

136. Nat. 10.8; further cf. Nat. 10.2-10, 12.2-3.

137. Further on the place of these hymns in Jewish-Christian polemics of the fourth century, cf. K. McVey, "Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on the Nativity and the Tol'dot Yeshu'," (to appear).

138. Cf. Nat. 14. 7-19, 15. 7-8.

139. Cf. Nat. 2.7.

140. Cf. Nat. 16. 9-11.

INTRODUCTION

birth to and nourished and cared for the Incarnate One who gave life, nourishment and care to her. In this she represents all humans and indeed all creation:

By power from Him Mary's womb became able
to bear the One Who bears all.
From the great treasury of all creation
Mary gave to Him every thing that she gave.
She gave Him milk from what He made exist.
She gave Him food from what He had created.
As God, He gave milk to Mary.
In turn, as man, He was given suck by her.¹⁴¹

The radical identification of God with creation and especially with humankind is a result of the incarnation. In the incarnation the God who utterly transcends his creation has imprinted himself onto his creation like a seal.¹⁴² He has done this not out of any limitation or need, but out of passionate love for humankind.¹⁴³ By assenting to the incarnation at the moment of the annunciation, Mary has made this possible, because God willed to be dependent on humans even in this.¹⁴⁴

B The Hymns Against Julian

The five hymns concerning the apostate emperor are surely authentic. They follow the fifteen *Hymns on Paradise* in one of the earliest manuscripts, apparently because both collections have the same melody.¹⁴⁵ Whereas the *Hymns on Paradise* were probably composed in Ephrem's earliest years in Nisibis, he did not begin the *Hymns against Julian* until the final weeks of Julian's reign, during the Mesopotamian campaign undertaken in the spring of 363 from Antioch. The hymns were completed

141. Nat. 4. 182–185; cf. also Nat. 4. 143–213 and Nat. 11.

142. Cf. Nat. 1. 97–99; also 2.21, 3.5, 3.17.

143. Cf. Nat. 13.12–14.

144. Cf. Nat. 5.20.

145. Cf. E. Beck, CSCO 174, i–ii. That manuscript, B.M.Add. 14571, includes the hymn “de Ecclesia” between the *Hymns on Paradise* and the four hymns explicitly against Julian. Its colophon, which refers to “five hymns against Emperor Julian the pagan,” confirms that the hymn ought to be considered together with the other four against Julian.

INTRODUCTION

after the emperor's death, since Ephrem mentions having seen his body carried in state past Nisibis.¹⁴⁶

1 Editions and Translations of the *Hymns against Julian*

The *Hymns against Julian* were edited by Overbeck in 1865.¹⁴⁷ Overbeck's text has been translated into German by Bickell, Euringer and Beck.¹⁴⁸ Excerpts have been quoted in English translation by Bowersock, Browning, Levenson and Griffith; a first complete English translation was recently published by Samuel N. C. Lieu.¹⁴⁹

2 The Hymns As a Historical Source

In these four hymns, which Bowersock has called "four astonishingly vivid and intense invectives," Ephrem shows himself to be far from dispassionate. Since he is nevertheless an eyewitness to the events he describes, his words constitute a significant historical source for the last weeks of the emperor's life and for the circumstances of his death.¹⁵⁰ Ephrem is the only ancient author to mention the coinage issued just before the ill-fated campaign in Mesopotamia. His claim that its image of a bull with two stars represents the Golden Calf of Sinai, however, is problematic.¹⁵¹ The hymns also help to clarify the circumstances that led to Julian's orders to burn his own fleet. Ephrem's claim that the emperor was deceived by Easterners and that "his idols and diviners were entangled in a snare" corroborate the report of Ammianus Marcellinus that a betrayal led to the

146. CJ 3.1. On the dating of the final four hymns, cf. Glen W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 10.

147. J.J. Overbeck, *S. Ephraemi Syri, Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni, Balaci Aliorumque Opera Selecta*, (Oxford, 1865), 3–20.

148. G. Bickell, ZKT II, 335–56; S. Euringer, BKV (Kempten-Muenchen, 1919), 197–233; E. Beck, CSCO 174–75, scr. syr. 78–79 (Louvain, 1957). For Beck's discussion of the previous work and his relation to it, cf. Beck, CSCO 174, scr. syr. 78, i–ii and CSCO 175, scr. syr. 79, ii.

149. Glen W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 114, 116; Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (London, 1975), 217; David B. Levenson, *A Source- and Tradition-Critical Study of the Stories of Julian's Attempt to Rebuild the Jerusalem Temple* (Harvard diss., 1980); Sidney H. Griffith, "Ephraem the Syrian's Hymns 'Against Julian': Meditations on History and Imperial Power," *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), 238–66; Samuel N.C. Lieu, ed., *The Emperor Julian: Panegyric and Polemic*, Claudius Mamertinus, John Chrysostom, Ephrem the Syrian, (Liverpool, 1986).

150. Although he sounds a cautionary note on the historical value of Ephrem's information, Beck enumerates several points on which he offers information, CSCO 175, lf. Bowersock especially emphasizes the importance of these hymns as a historical source, cf. Julian, 10, 104, 114ff.; Browning also uses them, cf. Emperor, 192, 213–17.

151. Cf. CJ 1.16–19 and notes ad loc.

INTRODUCTION

emperor's action as opposed to Libanius' claim that Julian formulated this plan for his own tactical reasons. Moreover, Ephrem's remarks are consistent with Gregory Nazianzen's contention that a treacherous Persian nobleman was the source of the emperor's faulty strategy.¹⁵² Further, unlike Libanius, Gregory and Sozomen, Ephrem shows no interest in the identity of Julian's assailant,¹⁵³ asserting instead that the emperor virtually committed suicide.¹⁵⁴ The fact that Ammianus is silent on this point probably indicates that any Christian plot to eliminate the pagan emperor is strictly the product of later imagination.¹⁵⁵ Finally, although the city itself was ceded to Persia, the settlement of Jovian with Shapur must have included respecting the Christian churches of the city and allowing the citizens of Nisibis to leave for Roman territory rather than executing them, enslaving them or exiling them into the eastern reaches of the Persian Empire, as Shapur had done with the inhabitants of other recalcitrant Mesopotamian cities.¹⁵⁶

3 Literary and Theological Themes

The *Hymns against Julian*, along with the *Carmina Nisibena*, display Ephrem's kinship with the Jewish prophets.¹⁵⁷ Like them, he contemplates the political and military events of his time in the light of his ethical and theological tenets, looking for evidence of divine activity, rewards, punishments and edifying moral lessons. Warnings against idolatry and encouragement in adversity are as prominent in these hymns as in the pronouncements of Jeremiah and Isaiah. In Ephrem's view God made the apostate emperor the representative and symbol of all who hold erroneous views—not only pagans but also heretics and Jews. His defeat is a sign to all nations of the ultimate fate of those who oppose God.

The first of these five hymns stands apart from the rest since it was written prior to Julian's death. Here the poet offers a message of hope and perseverance to the people of Nisibis, threatened with persecution. The

152. Cf. CJ 2.18 and note ad loc., also CJ 3.15.

153. Cf. CJ 3.14.1 and note ad loc.

154. CJ 3.16; cf. note ad loc.

155. So Bowersock correctly argues, cf. *idem*, Julian, 116.

156. Cf. CJ 2.22–27.

157. I am grateful to Sidney Griffith for drawing my attention to the importance of the theological themes of these hymns. There is considerable congruence between motifs here set forth and those Griffith has presented in his recent article in the context of a persuasive argument that as *madrāṣe* these hymns should be seen not as invectives but rather as “biblically oriented meditations on history” (cf. Griffith, Julian, esp. 244).

INTRODUCTION

other four hymns reiterate and develop that message in the light of subsequent events. Rather than focussing on the loss of their city to the Persians, a catastrophe caused by Nisibene acquiescence to Julian's reestablishment of paganism there, Ephrem emphasizes that the claims of paganism have been proved false by the fate of the apostate emperor. The political events provide a larger-than-life drama of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. God's partisans, the true members of the church of Nisibis, with the encouragement of the watching angels, withstood the onslaughts of Satan in the form of imperial persecution and Persian military attacks.

Using a favorite metaphor, the mirror as the instrument of divine ethical lessons, Ephrem takes the apostate emperor as the model of human pride as well as of political promotion of religious error. His policies unmasked the false Christians within the church; his ignominious death demonstrates the folly of his pride as well as the falsity of his beliefs. The divine purpose in the defeat and death of the Roman emperor was to present to all people a model of the vanity of idolatry. At the same time the fidelity of Christians has been tested and many have been found wanting during the pagan emperor's brief reign. Weak or false Christians have returned openly to paganism, or they have attacked their Creator in the contentious error of the Arian heresy. The Jewish people have also returned to idolatrous worship. On the other hand, the city of Nisibis presents, again as if in a mirror, a model for fidelity to God, its rewards, and the consequences of its lapse. Reinforcing this primary imagery is the symbol of the church as the true vine, beneficially pruned by the rigors of persecution:

Rely on the truth, my brothers, and be not afraid
for our Lord is not so weak as to fail us in the test.
He is the power on which the world and its inhabitants depend.
The hope of His church depends on Him.
Who is able to sever its heavenly roots?¹⁵⁸

Although the branch is living, on it are dead fruits
blooming only outwardly.
The wind tried them and cast off the wild grapes.¹⁵⁹

158. CJ 1.1.

159. CJ 1.5; cf. 1.10–11.

INTRODUCTION

Several other metaphors serve to teach the same lesson: separation of the wheat from the tares,¹⁶⁰ the purification of gold in the furnace,¹⁶¹ and separation of the curds and whey in cheesemaking.¹⁶²

To these symbols current in both biblical and general Hellenistic contexts, Ephrem adds biblical examples of faithless sovereigns and the consequences of their erroneous ways: Nebuchadnezzar, Jeroboam, Ahab, Jotham, Manasseh, Jezebel, Athaliah and Saul provide precedents for Julian's errors as well as his fate.¹⁶³ The attendant notions of true and false prophecy provide a context for his contention that in this case the church has followed the course of Daniel, confronting the pagan ruler, whereas the Jewish people have followed the precedent of the Israelites under Jeroboam, worshipping the golden calf.¹⁶⁴ While this general approach, aptly named "prophetic anti-Judaism" by Ruether, is typical of patristic writers,¹⁶⁵ Ephrem pursues his view with tenacious originality, accompanied, one suspects, by a modicum of perverse misrepresentation. In support of the parallel with the Israelite worship of the golden calf, for example, he associates Julian's bull coinage with his attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem as well as claiming that the music and sacrifice of traditional Jewish worship resemble pagan worship in its raucousness.¹⁶⁶ Likewise, to the established argument that Daniel prophesied the permanent destruction of the Jewish Temple, he adds the claim implicit in Constantine's building program but not generally stated in theological polemics that Christian pilgrimage functions as a substitute for the Jewish cult of Jerusalem.¹⁶⁷

Throughout the hymns, he exploits an extensive variety of animal imagery. The Orphic and broadly Hellenistic notion of a philanthropic shepherd king, already well-established as a model for Christ, is presented as a foil for Julian, the bad king.¹⁶⁸ Rather than a good shepherd, he is a wolf in sheep's clothing, or a he-goat, favoring the goats rather than

160. CJ 1.10–13, 2.10–11.

161. CJ 1.13, 2.24, 4.1.

162. CJ 4.2.

163. CJ 1.8, 1.20, 2.2, 4.5, 4.8.

164. CJ 1.16–20, 2.2.

165. Ruether, *Fratricide*, 117–82.

166. CJ 1.16.

167. CJ 4.23–25.

168. CJ 1.1–2. On Orpheus in Edessa, cf. Segal, *Edessa*, 52. On Christ-Orpheus in Ephrem and in other early Christian writers, cf. *Nat.* 3.7.3–6 and notes ad loc.

INTRODUCTION

the sheep.¹⁶⁹ The latter image has the added punch of alluding to Julian's unpopular beard as well as intimating lasciviousness.¹⁷⁰ Ephrem's almost apocalyptic description of the conflict between the forces of good and evil is enhanced by his association of the pagans with vermin, dragons and the primal chaos as well as with the more mundane insults of association with hogs and filth.¹⁷¹

Finally, Ephrem's symbolic imagination provides several examples of the ironic outcome of Julian's efforts. Considering it suitable that "the punishment should fit the crime," he finds numerous coincidences to confirm this view. For example, the emperor's death near Babylon in conjunction with his "denial" of Daniel's prophecy cements the parallel of Julian with Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁷² Moreover, Ephrem spins out in elaborate detail the inherent contradiction of Julian's attempt to use Chaldean religion to defeat Persians,¹⁷³ and the paradox that he was misled by the oracles to become himself the sacrificial goat.¹⁷⁴ The coincidental features of his Uncle Julian's fate should have astonished the apostate emperor as they did Ephrem.¹⁷⁵ Likewise heavy with significance is the similarity of Julian's death by a lance to the death of his sacrificial animals, both of which are implicitly contrasted with the death of the True Lamb who, being pierced, released humankind from the curse of the lance that barred the gate to Paradise.¹⁷⁶

C The Hymns on Virginity and on the Symbols of Our Lord

1 The Contents of the Collection

This collection of hymns is in reality a compilation of several smaller collections, each identifiable by unity of subject matter as well as by the use of a single melody. A few single hymns, usually related in subject matter, are interspersed with the smaller collections, which range in size from two to eighteen hymns. The largest of the sub-collections, hymns

169. CJ 2.1-4.

170. CJ 2.6-9, and cf. notes ad loc.

171. CJ 1.3, 1.5, 2.13.

172. CJ 1.18-20.

173. Cf. CJ 2.14, 4.5-14.

174. CJ 2.4-15.

175. Cf. CJ 4.3 and note ad loc. on Julian's uncle Julian.

176. CJ 3.14.

INTRODUCTION

thirteen to thirty, ends with three hymns on the “three harps of God,” the Old and New Testaments and Nature. These hymns set forth the central theme of the entire collection, an idea that is the basis of Ephrem’s symbolic theology: the presence of God in scripture and in nature. Hymns twenty-seven to thirty may, therefore, serve as a guide to the rest of the hymns in this collection and, indeed, to his entire hymnological production.

The theme of the first three hymns, from which the entire collection has received its name, is the consecrated virginity of the “daughters of the covenant.” Through the baptismal anointing this group is linked to the following sub-collection of four hymns (hymns 4–7) “on oil [or ointment], the olive and the symbols of the Lord,” which illustrate especially well Ephrem’s intertwining of various types of symbols: linguistic, scriptural, natural and sacramental. The next sub-collection is a group of three hymns (hymns 8–10) defending the Christian claim that Jesus is the messiah promised by the Jewish scripture. The theme of messianism links this group to the previous sub-collection. The next two sub-collections (hymns 13–30 and hymns 32–37) offer interpretations of a series of New Testament passages, treated in roughly chronological order. In both these groups of hymns Ephrem displays a marked interest in places associated with Jesus’ ministry. In the latter collection women are unusually prominent. The last of the sub-collections is a group of hymns on the prophet Jonah (hymns 42–50).

Considered in its entirety this collection of hymns contains a variety of polemics closely related to Ephrem’s fundamental theological insight. The pagans err in worshipping the works of God rather than God their Creator. Conversely the Marcionites err in claiming to worship God while denying the goodness and beauty of God’s creation. Both Judaism and Marcionism are pointedly rejected because they deny the presence of Christ in the Jewish scripture and in nature. The only correct path is through nature to the revelation of God in scripture. Some polemics against Manichaeism and Arianism appear here as well, particularly in the last two hymns.

To emphasize the polemical aspect of Ephrem’s work perhaps creates too harsh an impression. The set of hymns on Jonah contains a sharp anti-Jewish polemic reproaching Jonah as a Jewish prophet reluctant to be sent to the Gentiles of Nineveh and contrasting the Ninevites’ willingness to repent with Jonah’s unwillingness to preach repentance to them. Yet

INTRODUCTION

throughout these hymns Ephrem plays on a variety of paradoxes, ranging from fairly strong polemics to playful musings, such as that a fish swallowed a human whereas fish were meant to be swallowed by humans, or that a rational human being gave birth to an irrational infant whereas an irrational fish brought forth a rational adult. In short, it would be virtually impossible to separate the serious and sustained arguments from the light and occasionally entertaining asides, but that, of course, was precisely Ephrem's intent.

2 The Symbolic Theology of the Hymns on Virginity

Ephrem's poetry is based upon a vision of the world as a vast system of symbols or mysteries.¹⁷⁷ No person, thing or event in the world exists without a mysterious relation to the whole. History and nature constitute the warp and woof of reality. To divorce an individual from its context in either direction would destroy the handiwork of God in time and space. Each moment of life is governed by the Lord of life and is an opportunity to see oneself and the community in relation to that Lord. So not only the events described in scripture but all historical events must have profound religious significance, as we have seen in Ephrem's *Hymns against Julian*. Nature, too, is replete with intimations of the presence of God. In creating the world God deliberately presented us not only with examples of beauty and order but also with symbols that allude more richly to the identity of their Creator:

In every place, if you look, His symbol is there,
and when you read, you will find His prototypes.
For by Him were created all creatures,

177. On Ephrem's use of symbols, cf. E. Beck, "Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephraem," OC 42 (1958), 19–40; idem, "Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephraem," OCP 19 (1953), 1–24; F. Graffin, "L'Eucharistie chez Saint Éphrem," PdO 4 (1973), 93–121; L. Leloir, "Symbolisme et Parallélisme chez Éphrem," *À la rencontre de Dieu*, Mem. A. Gélin (Lyons, 1961), 364–73; R. Murray, "The Lance Which Reopened Paradise," OCP 39 (1973), 224–34, 491; idem, "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," PdO 6 (1975), 1–20; idem, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975); P. Yousif, "La Croix de Jésus et le Paradis d'Eden dans la typologie biblique de Saint Éphrem," PdO 6 (1975), 29–48; idem, "Le symbolisme de la croix dans la nature chez Saint Éphrem de Nisibe," OCA 205 (1978), Symposium Syriacum 1976, 207–27; idem, "Symbolisme christologique dans la Bible et dans la nature chez Saint Éphrem, de Nisibe," PdO 8 (1977–78), 5–66; idem, "St. Ephrem on symbols in nature: Faith, the Trinity and the Cross (Hymns on Faith no. 18)," ECR 10 (1978), 52–60; idem, "Histoire et temps dans la pensée de saint Éphrem de Nisibe," PdO 10 (1981–82), 3–35; S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985).

INTRODUCTION

and He imprinted His symbols upon His possessions.
When He created the world,
He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.
Streams of His symbols opened, flowed and poured forth
His symbols on its members.¹⁷⁸

Biblical Symbols

Among the historical symbols biblical typology plays the central role. The events in Jewish history narrated in Hebrew scripture have religious significance for all people. Like most early Christian writers, however, Ephrem saw the Hebrew scripture as preliminary sketches, as shadows, when compared with the realities of the New Testament:

[Christ's] power perfected the types,
and His truth the mysteries,
His interpretation the similes,
His explanations the sayings,
and His assurances the difficulties.

By His sacrifice He abolished sacrifices,
and libations by His incense,
and the [passover] lambs by His slaughter,
the unleavened [bread] by His bread,
and the bitter [herbs] by His Passion.

By His healthy meal
He weaned [and] took away the milk.
By His baptism were abolished
the bathing and sprinkling
that the elders of the People taught.¹⁷⁹

Despite the intrinsic importance of the events and persons of the "Old Testament," they are only "antetypes," which were fulfilled in the "types" of the New Testament. On the one hand, the Passover Lamb is an anticipation of Christ and of the salvation gained through him. To at-

178. Virg. 20.12.

179. Virg. 8.8–10.

INTRODUCTION

tempt to understand Christ without knowing about the Passover would be to deprive oneself of the depth and richness of meaning placed in human history by God himself. Yet conversely, in Ephrem's view, to stop with the Passover Lamb rather than interpreting it as a symbol of Christ would mean missing the fullness of God's revelation and accepting a truncated version of the meaning of history.¹⁸⁰

The Role of the Incarnation and Humankind

At the center of all is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, who is at once the apex of history and the metaphysical Mediator between the ineffable Creator and the creation. Ephrem sets forth this notion most succinctly in the *Hymns on Virginity* 28–30, where he speaks of the three harps of God:

The Word of the Most High came down and put on
a weak body with hands,
and He took two harps [Old and New Testaments]
in His right and left hands.
The third [nature] He set before Himself
to be a witness to the [other] two,
for the middle harp taught
that their Lord is playing them.¹⁸¹

This strophe shows clearly that the lynchpin of his theological system is the paradox of the incarnation, through which God has revealed the relation of the two Testaments to one another and to nature.

As we have seen, the major theme of the nativity hymns is the wonder of the incarnation, conceived not only as a singular historical event but also as an ongoing availability of God to each human being. In the *Hymns on Virginity* Ephrem explores and refines these ideas. Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is especially symbolic of God's personal relation to each human being:

The glorious fount of Him Who was sitting
at the well as Giver of drink to all,
flows to each according to His will:

180. Cf. *Virg.* 10.

181. *Virg.* 29.1.

INTRODUCTION

different springs according to those who drink.
From the well a single undifferentiated drink
came up each time for those who drank.
The Living Fount lets distinct blessings
flow to distinct people.¹⁸²

But, not satisfied merely to meet each of us at our present level of spiritual discernment, God leads each of us step by step to higher levels of understanding. Again, the Samaritan woman is paradigmatic of this process:

Because she in her love said, "The Messiah will come,"
he revealed to her with love, "I am He."
That He was a prophet she believed already,
soon after, that He was the Messiah . . .
. . . she is a type of our humanity
that He leads step by step.¹⁸³

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the Beloved Disciple are also especially significant in Ephrem's understanding of the ongoing process of the incarnation in sanctification, the full restoration in each human being of the lost *imago dei*. Mary and John see in one another the complementary mysteries of God's condescending love for us and the bold access to divine love now open to human beings.¹⁸⁴ Through them we, too, may see this twofold mystery of our Savior:

You, Lord, . . . they saw . . .
while observing one another:
Your mother saw You in Your disciple,
and he saw You in Your mother.
The seers who at every moment
see You, Lord in a mirror

182. Virg. 23.3. For further exploration of this theme, cf. K. E. McVey, "St. Ephrem's Understanding of Spiritual Progress: Some Points of Comparison with Origen of Alexandria," *The Harp* 1.2-3 (1988), 117-28.

183. Virg. 22.21.

184. Cf. Virg. 25.8.

INTRODUCTION

manifest a type so that we, too, in one another
may see You, Our Savior.¹⁸⁵

John is placed in this exemplary role not only because he was literally given to Mary by Jesus as her son, but because his love of his Lord led him to imitate Jesus, thus bringing into higher relief that *imago dei* engraved on each human being:

The youth who loved our Lord very much,
who portrayed [and] put Him on and resembled Him,
was zealous in all these matters to resemble Him,
in his speech, his aspect and his ways.
The creature put on his Creator,
and he resembled Him although indeed he did not resemble what He
was!

It was amazing how much the clay is able to be imprinted
with the beauty of its Sculptor.¹⁸⁶

For Ephrem, the virgin exemplifies most perfectly the concentration on the inner presence of Christ that leads to the full restoration of the *imago dei*:

[Mary Magdalen] turned her face away from everything
to gaze on one beauty alone.
Blessed is her love that was intoxicated, not sober,
so that she sat at His feet to gaze at Him.
Let you also portray the Messiah in your heart
and love Him in your mind.¹⁸⁷

Likewise it is the virgin who has most fully stripped off the old Adam to put on the new at baptism.¹⁸⁸ Her body is clothed in a new garment; it is the temple of God and his royal palace. However strongly Ephrem ad-

185. Virg. 25.9.

186. Virg. 25.4; cf. John 19.26.

187. Virg. 24.7.3–8; cf. also the remainder of Virg. 24, esp. Virg. 24.5. This hymn links the themes of the larger collection of the initial hymns, from which the collection gained its name.

188. Cf. Virg. 1.1–8.

INTRODUCTION

monishes the virgin to preserve her sexual innocence, it is clear that this is not an end in itself, but rather it is symbolic of the full dedication of self to God, which is the goal of every Christian life:

Let chastity be portrayed in your eyes and in your ears the sound of truth.

Imprint your tongue with the word of life and upon your hands [imprint] all alms.

Stamp your footsteps with visiting the sick, and let the image of your Lord be portrayed in your heart.

Tablets are honored because of the image of kings.

How much more will one be honored who portrayed the Lord in all the senses.¹⁸⁹

The Role of Things

Although it is clear that human beings with the *imago dei* enjoy a unique position in the world, certain material things enjoy a privileged place because they link the world of nature to the world of scripture. That privileged place is rooted in nature, in their physical properties and their names. So oil is symbolic of Christ and the salvation brought by him, not only because he is literally “the Anointed One” who fulfills the roles of priest, prophet and king, but also due to the natural properties of oil: its healing and strengthening properties, its capacity to provide light, its use with pigments for painting an image, its ability to ease forces in conflict, and even its property of floating on water, as Jesus walked on the water!¹⁹⁰ All these properties resonate in the baptismal anointing in which the *imago dei* is restored to us:

The lamp returned our lost things, and the Anointed also [returned] our treasures.

The lamp found the coin, and the Anointed [found] the image of Adam.¹⁹¹

189. Virg. 2.15. On the importance of celibacy and virginity in the Syriac tradition of Christianity and its relation to “single-mindedness,” cf. Vööbus, *Celibacy*; Murray, *Symbols*, 11–17, and *idem Characteristics*, 6–9, and A.F.J. Klijn, “The ‘Single One’ in the Gospel of Thomas,” *JBL* 81 (1962), 271–78.

190. Cf. Virg. 4–7.

191. Virg. 5.8.5–6; cf. Virg. 7.5–7, where it is also clear that a last anointing performs a similar function, Virg. 7.7.1–2.

INTRODUCTION

The bread and wine of the Eucharist, although they provide a less fertile field for Ephrem's imagination, play a similar role.¹⁹² Not only the elements of the sacraments, however, but other material things and concepts are symbolic of Christ. So Satan's temptations of Jesus have ironic appropriateness: He tempted with bread the "Sustainer of all"; with stones the perfect Stone, with kingship, the true King.¹⁹³ Even things without a symbolic tradition in scripture may be seen as representative of Christ's altruistic suffering.¹⁹⁴ Finally, every beauty of daily life is a tangible reminder of the graciousness of our God:

But remaining are all those things the Gracious One made in His
mercy.

Let us see those things that He does for us every day!
How many tastes for the mouth! How many beauties for the eye!
How many melodies for the ear! How many scents for the nostrils!
Who is sufficient in comparison to the goodness
of these little things!¹⁹⁵

IV | Suggestions for Further Study of St. Ephrem

Interest in the literary and hymnographic corpus of Ephrem the Syrian has grown considerably in recent years. Several major monographs and many more scholarly articles on various aspects of Ephrem's life, literary corpus and theology have appeared in the past thirty years. The pace has accelerated in the past decade. Likewise the interest in Syriac Christianity has grown considerably. As is often the case with areas of intensive scholarly work, it is difficult for the general reader to obtain a picture of the overall trends and to gain access to these subjects. There are two reasons for this problem: (1) much of the literature is in scholarly periodicals rather than in books; (2) the majority of the literature is in French or German. Further, a significant amount is in European languages other than English, or it is in Arabic or modern Syriac.

The English reader may wish to begin with Robert Murray's *Symbols*

192. Virg. 16.2,4,5 and 31.13-14; cf. also Graffin, Eucharistie.

193. Virg. 14; cf. also, Virg. 31.

194. Cf. Virg. 11.

195. Virg. 31.16.

INTRODUCTION

of *Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge, England, 1975) or with Sebastian Brock's forthcoming translation of the *Hymns on Paradise*, or with his selection of translations entitled *the Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of St. Ephrem* (Studies Supplemental to Sobornost 4, 2nd enlarged edition. Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1983), or with the same author's monograph entitled *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985). The latter two works contain further bibliographic suggestions. Sidney Griffith and others at the Institute of Christian Oriental Research, The Catholic University of America, promise an English translation of Ephrem's *Paschal Hymns* in the near future. The articles by Sidney Griffith listed in the abbreviations below will also be helpful.

The reader of French may wish to begin with the *Hymnes sur Paradis*, translated by R. Lavenant (Sources Chrétiennes 137, Paris, 1968), or the *Commentaire de L'Évangile Concordant ou Diatessaron*, translated by L. Leloir (SC 121, Paris, 1966). Several important studies by P. Yousif of Ephrem's system of symbolism may be found in the pages of *Parôle de l'Orient*, nos. 6–10 (1975–82). Many other translations of individual hymns as well as articles are in *L'Orient Syrien* and *Parôle de l'Orient*.

The German reader has the advantage of Beck's full set of translations of the authentic corpus of Ephrem accompanying the critical texts in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*. They are listed in the first section of abbreviations on page 49. Equally important are Beck's monographs and articles, which are also listed with the other abbreviations, in the third section under his name.

It would be superfluous to attempt to present a full bibliography of the secondary literature on Ephrem since others have accomplished this task. They are:

- M. P. Roncaglia, "Essai de bibliographie sur saint Éphrem," PdO 4 (1973), 343–70.
- Samir Khalil, "Compléments de bibliographie éphrémiennne," PdO 4 (1973), 371–92.
- S. Brock, "Syriac studies 1971–1980, a classified Bibliography," PdO 10 (1981–82), 291–412; esp. 320–27.

Abbreviations

I The Works of Ephrem the Syrian

		CSCO vol.	scr.syr.
HdF	Hymns on Faith	154–55	73–74
CH	Hymns against Heresies	169–70	76–77
HdP	Hymns on Paradise	174–75	78–79
CJ	Hymns against Julian	"	"
Nat.	Hymns on the Nativity	186–87	82–83
Epiph.	Hymns on the Epiphany	"	"
Eccl.	Hymns on the Church	198–99	84–85
CNis	Hymns on Nisibis	218–19	92–93
	(=Carmina Nisibena)	240–41	102–3
Virg.	Hymns on Virginity	223–24	94–95
Ieiun.	Hymns on Fasting	246–47	106–7
Azym.	Hymns on Unleavened bread	248–9	108–9
Cruc.	Hymns on the Crucifixion	"	"
Res.	Hymns on the Resurrection	"	"
Abr.	Hymns on Abraham Qidunaya	322–23	140–41
Jul. Sab.	Hymns on Juliana Saba	"	"
SdF	Mêmrê on Faith	212–13	88–89
de Dom. nos.	Sermon on Our Lord	270–71	116–17
	Mêmrê I	305–6	130–31
	Mêmrê II	311–12	134–35
	Mêmrê III	320–21	138–39
	Mêmrê IV	334–35	148–49
Supplementary	Hymns and Homilies	363–64	156–57
Homilies on Holy Week		412–13	181–82

ABBREVIATIONS

- Comm. Diat. = Ephrem, Commentary on the Diatesseron: *Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant, Texte syriaque*, ed. L. Leloir, Chester Beatty Monographs 8 (Dublin, 1963; French trans. L. Leloir, SC 121 [Paris, 1966]).
- Eph. Domnus = "Ephräms Rede gegen eine philosophische Schrift des Bardaisan," übersetzt und erklärt von E. Beck, OC 60 (1976), 24–68.
- Eph. Hypat. = "Ephraems Brief an Hypatios," übersetzt und erklärt von E. Beck, OC 58 (1974), 76–120.
- Eph. Pr. Ref. I = *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations of Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan*, I, ed. and trans. C. W. Mitchell (London, 1912).
- Eph. Pr. Ref. II = *Ibid.* II, ed. and trans. E. A. Bevan and F. C. Burkitt (London, 1921).
- Tonneau, Gen/Exod = R.-M. Tonneau. *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Commentarii*, CSCO 152–53, scr. syr. 71–72 (Louvain, 1955).

II Primary Sources other than Ephrem

- Amm. Mar. = Ammianus Marcellinus, *rerum gestarum libri*
- Aph. Dem. = Aphraates, *demonstrationes*
- Ath. de inc. = Athanasius Alexandrinus, *de incarnatione*
- Ath. gent. = Athanasius Alexandrinus, *contra gentes*
- Ath. adv. Ar. = Athanasius Alexandrinus, *orationes tres adversus Arianos*
- Bord. = *Itinerarium burdigalense*
- Clem. prot. = Clemens Alexandrinus, *protrepticus*
- Clem. paed. = Clemens Alexandrinus, *paedagogus*
- Clem. str. = Clemens Alexandrinus, *stromateis*
- Cod. Theod. = Theodosius II Imperator, *Codex Theodosianus*
- Didache = *Didache XII Apostolorum*
- Eger. Itin. = Egeria, *itinerarium Egeriae*
- Epiph. Pan. = *anakephalaïoses seu recapitulatio brevis panarii*
- Eusebius EH = Eusebius Caesariensis, *historia ecclesiastica*
- Greg. Naz. orat. = Gregorius Nazianzenus, *orationes*
- Greg. Nys. vit. Mos. = Gregorius Nyssenus, *de vita Mosis*
- Greg. Nys. de virg. = Gregorius Nyssenus, *de virginitate*
- Hier. epis. = Hieronymus Stridonensis, *epistulae*

ABBREVIATIONS

- Hier. de vir. ill. = Hieronymus Stridonensis, *de viris illustribus*
 Hipp. Apos. Trad. = Hippolytus Romanus, *traditio apostolica*
 Ign. Eph. = Ignatius Antiochenus, *epistula ad Ephesios*
 Iren. A.H. = Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *adversus haereses*
 Iren. Demonstr. = Irenaeus Lugdunensis, *demonstratio*
 Jo. Chrys. de virg. = Joannes Chrysostomus, *de virginitate*
 Jul. Imp. Galil. = Julianus Imperator, *oratio adversus Galilaeos*
 Jul. Imp. Misop. = Julianus Imperator, *Misopogon*
 Jul. Imp. orat. = Julianus Imperator, *orationes*
 Just. apol. = Justinus Martyr, Philosophus, *apologiae*
 Just. dial. = Justinus Martyr, Philosophus, *dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo*
 Lib. orat. = Libanius Antiochenus, *orationes*
 Luc. Sam. de Syr. Dea = Lucianus Samosatensis, *de Syria Dea*
 Meth. symp. = Methodius Olympius, *symposium*
 Min. Fel. Oct. = Marcius Minucius Felix, *Octavius*
 Od. Sol. = *Odes of Solomon*
 Or. c. Cels. = Origenes, *contra Celsum*
 Or. de prin. = Origenes, *de principiis*
 Or. Comm. Jn. = Origenes, *commentarii in Joannem*
 Or. dial.c.Her. = Origenes, *dialogus cum Heraclide*
 Pall. H. Laus. = Palladius Monachus, *historia Lausiaca*
 Prot. = *Evangelia Apocrypha, Protevangelium Jacobi*
 Soz. HE = Sozomenus Salaminus, *historia ecclesiastica*
 Tert. adv. Marc. = Q.S.F. Tertullianus, *adversus Marcionem*
 Tert. de idol. = Q.S.F. Tertullianus, *de idololatria*
 Tert. exh. ad cast. = Q.S.F. Tertullianus, *exhortatio ad castitatem*
 Theod. HE = Theodoretus Cyrrhensis, *historia ecclesiastica*
 Thphl. Ant. Autol. = Theophilus Antiochenus, *ad Autolycum*

III Journals, Series and Secondary Literature

- AB = *Analecta Bollandiana*
 AC = *Antike und Christentum*
 ACW = *Ancient Christian Writers*
 ANRW = *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*
 Bauer, Orthodoxy = Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Earliest*

ABBREVIATIONS

- Christianity*, trans. from the second German edition by R. Kraft, G. Krodel et al. (Philadelphia, 1971).
- Beck, Asketentum = Asketentum und Mönchtum bei Ephräm, OCA 153, 341–62.
- idem, Baptême = idem, “Le baptême chez Saint Éphrem,” OS 2 (1956) 111–30.
- idem, Bildtheologie = “Zur Terminologie von Ephräms Bildtheologie,” in Schmidt and Geyer, Typus, 239–77.
- idem, Eucharistie = “Die Eucharistie bei Ephräm,” OC 38 (1954), 41–67.
- idem, Lobgesang = *Ephräm der Syrer: Lobgesang aus der Wüste*, Sophia 7, (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1967).
- idem, Mariologie = “Die Mariologie der echten Schriften Ephräms,” OC 40 (1956), 29–34.
- idem, Paradies = *Ephräms Hymnen über das Paradies*, SA 26 (Rome, 1951).
- idem, Polemik = *Ephräms Polemik gegen Mani und die Manichäer*. CSCO 391 = Subs. 55 (Louvain, 1978).
- idem, Psychologie = *Ephräms des Syrsers Psychologie und Erkenntnislehre*, CSCO 419, Subs. 58 (Louvain, 1980).
- idem, Reden = *Ephräms Reden über den Glauben, ihr theologischer Lehrgehalt und ihr geschichtliche Rahmen*, SA 33 (Rome, 1953).
- idem, Spiegel = “Das Bild vom Spiegel bei Ephräm” OCP 19 (1953), 1–24.
- idem, Symbolum-Mysterium = “Symbolum-Mysterium bei Aphraat und Ephräm,” OC 42 (1958), 19–40.
- idem, TEXNH = “TEXNH und TEXNITHΣ bei dem Syrer Ephräm,” OCP 47 (1981), 295–331.
- idem, Theologie = *Die Theologie des heiligen Ephraem in seinen Hymnen über den Glauben*, SA 21 (Vatican City, 1949).
- Bertrand, Mystique = Frederick Bertrand, *Mystique de Jésus chez Origène*, Théologie 23 (Paris, 1951).
- Biblia Patristica = *Biblia Patristica. Index des citations et allusions bibliques dans la littérature patristique*. A. Benoit et al., eds., Centre d’Analyse et de Documentation patristiques, 3 vols. (Paris, 1975–80).
- BJRL = Bulletin of the John Rylands Library
- BKV = Bibliothek der Kirchnväter
- Boak and Sinnigen = A.E.R. Boak and William Sinnigen, *A History of Rome to A.D. 565*, 5th ed. (New York, 1965).

ABBREVIATIONS

- Bowersock, Julian = Glen W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).
- Bradley, Background = Ritamary Bradley, "The Patristic Background of the Motherhood Similitude in Julian of Norwich," *Christian Scholar's Review* 1978, 101–13.
- Brock, Christians = "Christians in the Sassanian Empire: A Case of Divided Loyalties," *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982), 1–19.
- idem, Clothing = "Clothing Metaphors As a Means of Theological Expression in Syriac Tradition," in Schmidt and Geyer, Typus, 11–40.
- idem, Harp = *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of Saint Ephrem*, 2d ed., Studies Supplementary to Sobornost 4 (London, 1983).
- idem, Introduction = "An Introduction to Syriac Studies," in Eaton, Horizons, 1–33.
- idem, Luminous = *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985).
- idem, Temple = "A Letter Attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem on the Rebuilding of the Temple," BSOAS 40 (1977), 267–86.
- Brown, Gospel According to John = Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., The Anchor Bible (New York, 1966).
- idem, Messiah = *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (New York, 1977).
- Browning, Emperor = Robert Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (London 1975).
- BSOAS = Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies
- Cameron, Shroud = Averil Cameron, "The Sceptic and the Shroud," Inaugural Lecture, Departments of Classics and History, King's College (London, 29 April 1980).
- CBQ = Catholic Biblical Quarterly
- CE = The Catholic Encyclopedia
- CHR = The Catholic Historical Review
- Cramer, Engelvorstellungen = Winfrid Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephräm dem Syrer*, OCA 173 (Rome, 1965).
- CSCO = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
- DACL = *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (Paris, 1907–1953).
- Davies, Anti-Semitism = A.T. Davies, *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York, 1979).

ABBREVIATIONS

- de Halleux, Mar Éphrem = André de Halleux, "Mar Éphrem Théologien," *PdO* 4 (1973), 35–54.
- Devos, Egerie = P. Devos, "Égérie à Édesse. S. Thomas L'Apôtre: Le Roi Abgar," *AB* 85 (1967), 381–400.
- Dillon, Platonists = John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca, New York, 1977).
- Dölger, AC = F.J. Dölger, *Antike und Christentum*, Münster.
- idem, Ichthus = *Ichthus. Das Fisch-Symbol in Frühchristlicher Zeit*, 5 vols., (Münster, 1928–32).
- idem, Sphragis = *Sphragis: Eine altchristliche Taufbezeichnung in ihren Beziehungen zur profanen und religiösen Kultur des Altertums*, Studien zur Geschichte u. Kultur des Altertums 5 (Paderborn, 1911; rep. 1967).
- DOP = Dumbarton Oaks Papers
- Drijvers, Bardaisan = H.J.W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, *Studia Semitica Neerlandica* 6 (Assen, 1966).
- idem, Book = *The Book of the Laws of the Countries: The Dialogue on Fate of Bardaisan of Edessa* (Assen, 1965).
- idem, Cults = *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa* (Leiden, 1980).
- idem, Hatra = "Hatra Palmyra und Edessa. Die Städte der syrisch-mesopotamischen Wüste in politischer, kulturgeschichtlicher und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung," *ANRW* II, 8 (1977), 799–906.
- idem, Jews = "Jews and Christians at Edessa," *JJS* 36 (1985), 88–102.
- idem, Persistence = "The Persistence of Pagan Cults and Practices in Christian Syria," in Garsoian et al., *East of Byzantium*, 35–43.
- Eaton, Horizons = *Horizons in Semitics Studies: Articles for the Student*, ed. J. H. Eaton (Birmingham, 1980).
- ECR = Eastern Churches Review
- EJ = *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 vols. (Jerusalem, 1971).
- Fiey, Évêques = J. M. Fiey, "Les évêques de Nisibe au temps de saint Éphrem," *PdO* 4 (1973), 123–36.
- idem, Nisibe = *Nisibe: métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours*, *CSCO* 388, subsidia 54 (Louvain, 1977).
- Garsoian, et al. *East of Byzantium* = N. G. Garsoian, T. F. Mathews and R. W. Thomson, eds., *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period* (Washington, D.C., 1982).
- GCS = Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller
- Ginzberg, Legends = Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia, 1939–42).

ABBREVIATIONS

- Graef, Mary = Graef, Hilda, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion*, 2 vols. (New York, 1965).
- Graffin, Cherubin = F. Graffin, "La soghita du cherubin et du larron," OS 12 (1967), 481-90.
- idem, Eucharistie = "L'Eucharistie chez Saint Éphrem," PdO 4 (1973), 93-116.
- Griffith, Ephraem = Griffith, Sidney H., "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, ed. Thomas Halton and J. P. Williman (Washington, D.C., 1986), 25-52.
- idem, Julian = "Ephraem the Syrian's Hymns 'Against Julian': Meditations on History and Imperial Power," *Vigiliae Christianae* 41 (1987), 238-66.
- Hausherr, Noms = I. Hausherr, *Noms de Jésus et voies d'oraison*, OCA 157 (Rome, 1960).
- Hayman, Image = A. P. Hayman, "The Image of the Jew in the Syriac Anti-Jewish Polemical Literature," in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs, Scholar's Press Studies in the Humanities (Chico, California, 1986), 423-42.
- Hennecke, NT Apocrypha = E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by W. Schneemelcher, 2 vols. (Tübingen, 1959), English trans. by R. McL. Wilson, (Philadelphia, 1963).
- Honigmann, Liste = E. Honigmann, "La Liste originale des Pères de Nicée," *Byzantion* 14 (1939), 17-76.
- JAC = Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
- JE = *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, I. Singer, et al., 12 vols (New York, 1901-1907)
- JJA = Journal of Jewish Art
- JRS = Journal of Roman Studies
- Jones, Social and Economic History = A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social Economic and Administrative Survey*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1964).
- King, Julian = C. W. King, *Julian the Emperor, Containing Gregory Nazianzen's Two Invectives and Libanius' Monody with Julian's Extant Theosophical Works* (London, 1888).
- Kraeling, Final Report = *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters*, ed. M.

ABBREVIATIONS

- I. Rostovtzeff, et al.; C. H. Kraeling, *Final report 8: The Synagogue, Mithraeum and Christian Chapel* (New Haven, 1956).
- Kronholm, Motifs = Tryggve Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian with Particular Reference to the Influence of Jewish Exegetical Tradition*, Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament series 11 (Uppsala, 1978).
- Levene, Early Syrian Fathers = A. Levene, *The Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis* (London, 1951).
- Levenson, Attempt = David B. Levenson, *A Source- and Tradition- Critical Study of the Stories of Julian's Attempt to Rebuild the Jerusalem Temple* (Harvard diss., 1980).
- Lewy, Sobria ebrietas = H. Lewy, *Sobria ebrietas. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der antiken Mystik*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift zur neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 9 (Giessen, 1929).
- Malley, Hellenism = William Malley, *Hellenism and Christianity: The Conflict Between Hellenic and Christian Wisdom in the (Contra Galileos) of Julian the Apostate and the (Contra Julianum) of S. Cyril of Alexandria*, (Diss. P. Universita Gregoriana; Roma, 1978).
- Mansour, Liberté = T. B. Mansour, "La défense éphrémiennne de la liberté contre les doctrines marcionite, bardesanite et manichéenne" OCP 50 (1984), 331-46.
- Margoliouth = *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary Founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus of R. Payne Smith*, ed. by J. Payne Smith (Mrs. Margoliouth) (Oxford, 1903; rep. 1967).
- Martikainen, Böse = Jouko Martikainen, *Das Böse und der Teufel in der Theologie Ephraems des Syrers* (Åbo, 1978).
- idem, Gerechtigkeit = *Gerechtigkeit und Güte Gottes: Studien zur Theologie von Ephraem dem Syrer und Philoxenos von Mabbug*, Göttinger Orientforschungen 20 (Wiesbaden, 1981).
- idem, Remarks = "Some Remarks about the Carmina Nisibena as a Literary and a Theological Source," OCA 197 (1974), 345-52.
- McVey, Microcosm = Kathleen McVey, "The Domed Church as Microcosm: Literary Roots of an Architectural Symbol," DOP 37 (1983), 91-121.
- idem, Singing = "Jacob of Sarug on Ephrem and the Singing of Women" (to appear).

ABBREVIATIONS

- idem, Tol'dot = "Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on the Nativity and the Tol'dot Yesu'" (to appear).
- Moore, Judaism = George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1929; rep. 1966).
- Morris = J.B. Morris, *Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford, 1847).
- Murray, Characteristics = Robert Murray, "The Characteristics of the Earliest Syriac Christianity," in Garsoian, et al., *East of Byzantium*, 3–16.
- idem, Exhortation = "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syriac Church," NTS 21 (1974–75), 59–80.
- idem, Lance = "The Lance Which Re-opened Paradise" OCP 39 (1973), 224–34.
- idem, Mary = "Mary, the Second Eve in the Early Syrian Fathers," ECR 3.4 (1971), 372–84.
- idem, Symbols = *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge, England, 1975).
- idem, Theory = "The Theory of Symbolism in St. Ephrem's Theology," PdO 6–7 (1975–76), 1–28.
- Neusner, HJB = Jacob Neusner, *History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 5 vols. (Leiden, 1965–70).
- idem, TJSB = *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia: essays and studies* (Leiden, 1976).
- Nöldeke = Theodor Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste Syrische Grammatik* (Leipzig, 1898; rep. 1966).
- NPNF = The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church
- NTS = New Testament Studies
- OC = Oriens Christianus
- OCA = Orientalia Christiana Analecta
- OCP = Orientalia Christiana Periodica
- Ortiz de Urbina, Vergine = I. Ortiz de Urbina, "La Vergine Maria nella Teologia di S. Efrem," OCA 197 (1972), 65–104.
- OS = L'Orient Syrien
- Ouspensky, Icons = L. Ouspensky and V. Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, New York, 1982).

ABBREVIATIONS

- Outtier, Saint Éphrem = B. Outtier, "Saint Éphrem d'après ses biographies et ses œuvres," *PdO* 4 (1973), 11–33.
- PdO = Parôle de l'Orient
- Payne-Smith = *Thesaurus syriacus*, collegerunt Stephanus M. Quatremere, Georgius Henricus Bernstein et alii; auxit, digessit, exposuit, edidit Robert Payne Smith, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1879–1901).
- Peeters, Legende = P. Peeters, "La légende de St. Jacques de Nisibe," *AB* 38 (1920), 285–373.
- Petersen, Diatesseron = William L. Petersen, *The Diatesseron and Ephrem Syrus as Sources of Romanos the Melodist*, CSCO 466, subsidia 73 (Louvain, 1986).
- PS = Patrologia Syriaca
- Quasten, Musik = J. Quasten, *Musik und Gesang in den Kulturen der Heidnischen Antike und Christlichen Frühzeit*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 25 (Maria-Laach, 1930; rep. Münster, 1973, with additional notes, 275–84).
- idem, Singing = "The Liturgical Singing of Women in Christian Antiquity," *CHR* 27 (1941), 149–65.
- RE = Pauly, August, *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Neue Bearbeitung hrsg. von Georg Wissowa (Stuttgart, Serie I: vol. 1–24 [A–Q]: 1894–1963; Serie II: vol. 1–10 [R–Z]: 1920–1972; Suppl.: Vol. 1–15: 1903–1978).
- Robinson, NHL = *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, translated by members of the Coptic Gnostic Library Project of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, James M. Robinson, Director (New York, 1977).
- Ruether, Fratricide = Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide* (New York, 1974).
- SA = Studia Anselmiana
- Saber, Théologie = P. Georges Saber, *La théologie baptismale de Saint Éphrem, Essai de théologie historique*, Bibliothèque de l'Université Saint Esprit 8 (Kaslik, 1974).
- idem, Typologie = "La typologie sacramentaire et baptismale de saint Éphrem," *PdO* 4 (1973), 73–92.
- SBL = Society of Biblical Literature
- SBLTT = Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations Series
- SC = Sources Chrétiennes
- Scholer, NHB = David Scholer, *Nag Hammadi Bibliography*, Nag

ABBREVIATIONS

- Hammedi Studies 1 (Leiden, 1971), with annual supplements in NT 13 (1971ff.)
- Séd, Hymnes sur Paradis = M. Séd, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis de saint Éphrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968), 455–501.
- Segal, Edessa = J.B. Segal, *Edessa the "Blessed City"* (Oxford, 1970).
- Schmidt and Geyer, Typus = *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den ostlichen Vätern und ihre Parallelen im Mittelalter*, ed. M. Schmidt with C. F. Geyer (Regensburg, 1982).
- Scholem, Major Trends = Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1941).
- SPCK = Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge
- Teixidor, Descente = J. Teixidor, "Le thème de la descente aux enfers chez Saint Éphrem," *OS* 6 (1961), 25–40.
- idem, Muerte = "Muerte, Cielo y Seol en san Efren," *OCP* 27 (1961), 82–114.
- TU = Texte und Untersuchungen
- Van Buren, Discerning the Way = Paul Van Buren, *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York, 1980).
- Vielhauer, Oikodome = P. Vielhauer, *Oikodome: das Bild von Bau in der christlichen Literatur vom Neuen Testament bis Clemens Alexandrinus* (diss. Heidelberg; Karlsruhe-Durlach, 1940).
- Vööbus, Celibacy = Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy, A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church*, Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile (Stockholm, 1951).
- ZKT = Zeitschrift für Katolische Theologie
- Westermann, Slave Systems = William Linn Westermann, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman antiquity*, *Memoirs of the American Philological Society* 40, (Philadelphia, 1955).
- Wilken, Christians = Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, 1984).
- idem, Chrysostom = *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century*, *The Transformation of the Classical Heritage* IV (Berkeley, 1983).
- Wilkinson, Pilgrims = John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster, England, 1977).
- Yousif, Croix = P. Yousif, "La croix de Jésus et le Paradis d'Éden dans la typologie biblique de saint Éphrem," *PdO* 6 (1975), 29–48.
- ZKT = Zeitschrift für Katolische Theologie

Hymns on the Nativity

1

This hymn presents an array of testimonies by the kings, priests and prophets to Jesus' messianic office (str. 1). Ephrem begins with some of the citations that even within the New Testament had been claimed as messianic prophecies by David and Solomon as well as Isaiah, Micah, Balaam and Zechariah (str. 2–9). The worm provides an intimation from the world of nature of the wonders of the incarnation and virgin birth, also anticipated by the creation of Adam and Eve and the sprouting of Aaron's staff (str. 10–19). Using an argument known in rabbinic sources, that Ruth was guided in her behavior by the anticipation of the Messiah (str. 13), he applies it to Tamar as well (str. 12). Then he applies it to a line of personages from the Old Testament, beginning with Seth and his descendants and reaching to Elijah (str. 20–38). He reiterates the idea that the righteous of the Old Testament "saw" the Messiah, recapitulating with a line from Adam, Abel and Eve, through Noah, Enoch, Abraham and Isaac (str. 39–60). The angelic Watchers provide a transition to the theme of watchfulness, keeping vigil—on the one hand, urging its importance (str. 61–75), on the other, arguing the greater necessity of moral rectitude (str. 76–81). The final strophes (82–99), a series of moral exhortations explicitly related to the liturgical theme, show that the hymn was composed for the vigil of Christmas-Epiphany.

1

To the melody, "The confessors."¹

- 1 My Lord, this day gladdens kings, priests and prophets,
for on it were fulfilled and realized all their words.

1. Although the melodies to which these hymns were sung are no longer known, the manuscript tradition identified each tune by the first few words of what was evidently a well-known hymn. Further, cf. Beck, CSCO 186 (scr. syr. 82), xx–xxii.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Refrain: Glory to You, Son of our Creator!

- 2 Since today the Virgin has given birth to Emmanuel² in Bethlehem,
the word Isaiah spoke was accomplished today.
- 3 He Who registers the peoples³ was born there;
the psalm that David sang has been fulfilled today.
- 4 The word that Micah spoke was realized today,
for a shepherd went out from Ephrata, and his staff herded souls.⁴
- 5 "Behold, a star shone forth from Jacob, and a prince arose from
Israel."⁵
The prophecy that Balaam spoke found its meaning today.
- 6 The hidden light descended, and its beauty shone forth from a
body;
the dawn of which Zechariah spoke lights up Bethlehem today.⁶
- 7 The light of kingship glorifies him in Ephrata, the city of kings;
the blessing that Jacob pronounced found its fulfillment today.⁷
- 8 "The tree of life brings hope" to the dying;⁸
the hidden saying of Solomon found its explanation today.
- 9 Today a child was born, and he was called "wonder,"⁹
for it is a wonder that God reveals Himself as an infant.
- 10 The Spirit spoke a parable in the worm, for it reproduces without
sexual union;
the type the Holy Spirit fashioned receives its meaning today.¹⁰

2. Isa. 7.14.

3. Ps. 87.6. In the Peshitta this verse reads, "The Lord registers the peoples; this one was born there." By changing almost nothing except the word order, Ephrem gives the verse a Christian interpretation.

4. Mic. 5.2 (5.1 Pes.).

5. Num. 24.17 (Pes.).

6. Zech. 2.5 The dawn, *dnh'*, and the corresponding symbolism of light shining out of darkness, are important to Ephrem's notion of the Nativity. Light symbolism is inextricably tied to Epiphany since the same word, *dnh'*, means epiphany, manifestation. Further, cf. H. Usener, *Das Weinachtsfest*, Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen (Bonn, 1911; rep. Hildesheim, 1972), 202–8.

7. Gen. 49.8–12.

8. Prov. 12.13 (Pes.). The tree of life is an important symbol for Ephrem, cf. Yousif, Croix, esp. 42ff.; Kronholm, *Motifs*, 73f. For Ephrem's use of the image in the context of other Syriac authors and earlier Near Eastern traditions, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 114–30, 320–24 et passim.

9. Isa. 9.6.

10. Ephrem sees the unusual reproductive system of the worm (*twl'*), as foreshadowing the virginal conception of Christ. In the anti-Arian HdF 41.1.4 Ephrem cites the "solitary" reproduction of the same animal (*yhyd'yt nb'*) as analogous to the Father's begetting of the Son. "Type" here translates Syriac *twps'*, which is approximately equivalent to Greek τύπος from which it derives; further, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 240–44.

HYMN 1

- 11 He rose up like a shoot before Him, a shoot from the parched
earth;¹¹
something spoken secretly occurred openly today.
- 12 Since the King was hidden in Judah, Tamar stole Him from his
loins;
today shone forth the splendor of the beauty whose hidden form she
loved.¹²
- 13 Ruth lay down with Boaz because she saw hidden in him the
medicine of life;¹³
today her vow is fulfilled since from her seed arose the Giver of all
life.¹⁴
- 14 Man imposed corruption on woman when she came forth from him;
today she has repaid him—she who bore for him the Savior.¹⁵
- 15 He gave birth to the Mother, Eve—he, the man who never was
born;
how worthy of faith is the daughter of Eve, who without a man
bore a child!¹⁶
- 16 The virgin earth gave birth to that Adam, head of the earth;
the Virgin today gave birth to [second] Adam, head of heaven.
- 17 The staff of Aaron sprouted, and the dry wood brought forth;
his symbol has been explained today—it is the virgin womb that
gave birth.¹⁷
- 18 Put to shame is the people that holds the prophets to be true,
for if our Savior had not come, their words would have become
lies.¹⁸

11. Isa. 53.2 (Pes.).

12. Gen. 38.12–19; Matt. 1.3.

13. Cf. Ruth 3.7; Matt. 1.5. For a rabbinic parallel, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 153, n.6; for the same argument with regard to the Matthean genealogy, cf. Nat. 9.7–16.

14. Cf. Ruth 1.16f., 4.17.

15. Cf. Gen. 1.12. Here and in the following two verses it is important to note that “Adam” is the same Syriac word as “man” and it may be used in a generic sense. Also, *ḥwbl* is used in two distinct senses here, “corruption” and “recompense.” For discussion of this passage, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 145.

16. For Eve, mother of the living, cf. Gen. 3.20. Ephrem is fond of the paradox elaborated here and in the following verse; cf. Nat. 2.12 and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 54–56.

17. Cf. Num. 17.23. “Symbol” (*ṣṣ*), sometimes better rendered in English as “mystery,” is a technical term central to Ephrem’s symbolic theology and generally equivalent to *ṭwps*; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 240–44.

18. “The people” (*mm*) is Ephrem’s usual term for the Jewish people over against “the peoples,” the Gentiles. Ephrem clearly states here the polemical aspect of Christian typological interpretation of the Jewish scripture: if Jews do not accept Christian interpretation of the

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 19 Blessed is the True One Who comes from the True Father.¹⁹
He fulfilled the words²⁰ of the true [prophets], and they are
complete in their truth.
- 20 From Your treasury, my Lord, let us fetch from the treasures of
Your scriptures
the names of the just men of old who said they saw Your coming.
- 21 That Seth who took the place of Abel resembled the murdered son
to dull the sword that Cain brought into the creation.²¹
- 22 Noah saw the sons of God, the holy ones, who were suddenly made
wanton,
and he anticipated the Holy Son by Whom fornicators would be
made chaste.²²
- 23 The two brothers who hid Noah looked for the Only-Begotten of
God
to come and hide the nakedness of man,²³ intoxicated with pride.
- 24 Shem and Japheth, as compassionate [men] anticipated the
compassionate Son
Who would come and free Canaan from the servitude of sin.
- 25 Melchizedek anticipated Him; he the vicar was watching
to see priesthood's Lord Whose hyssop cleanses creation.²⁴

prophets (and typological interpretation of even the Torah), their own scripture is invalidated. Of course, Ephrem ignores the possibility that the messianic prophecies would be fulfilled at a later date.

19. Or "Father of Truth." Ephrem often uses *šrr*, "truth" or "reality" rather than the roughly synonymous *qwt* to denote the fulfillment of the types or symbols, both scriptural and natural. The term Father of Truth also occurs in Marcionite and Valentinian Gnostic texts. Ephrem may have deliberately chosen their term here with ironic intent since he stresses the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies by the Son of the Father of Truth.

20. A pun in Syriac, *wmlly ml*.

21. Gen. 4.25 states that Seth took the place of Abel since he had been killed by Cain. Both in Jewish legends and in certain forms of Gnosticism Seth was considered to be the ancestor of the Messiah and to resemble Adam or God in a particular way; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, I, 121, n.52, V, 149; Robinson, *NHL* s.v. "Seth." Ephrem shares these notions, but for him they, not the angels, are the "sons of God" of Gen. 6.1-4, who are degraded by intercourse with the daughters of Cain, cf. str. 22 and 48 below, and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 154, 163-71, 220-23.

22. On chastity as righteousness, cf. *ibid.* 159.

23. "man" = *'dm* = Adam; cf. Gen. 9.23.

24. Cf. Gen. 14.18-20. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine was commonly seen by early Christian writers as a type of the Eucharist. Although Ephrem uses his sacrifice as a type of the Eucharist, cf. *Azym* 2.8, Melchizedek is less important to his eucharistic doctrine than to his baptismal theology (for his more important eucharistic types, cf. Graffin, *Eucharistie*). He frequently alludes to the hyssop of Melchizedek, the symbol of the cleansing and forgiving power of the priesthood, which other writers normally associate with Aaron or the levitical priesthood. He seems deliberately to emphasize Melchizedek as a priest who antedates the

HYMN 1

- 26 Lot saw the Sodomites who perverted nature;
he looked for the Lord of natures Who gave chastity beyond
nature.²⁵
- 27 Aaron anticipated Him—he who saw that if his staff swallowed
reptiles,
His cross would swallow the Reptile that swallowed Adam and
Eve.²⁶
- 28 Moses saw the fixed serpent that healed the stings of basilisks,
and he anticipated he would see the Healer of the first Serpent's
wound.²⁷
- 29 Moses saw that he alone received the brightness of God,
and he anticipated the One to come—by His teaching, the
Multiplier of the godlike.²⁸
- 30 Kaleb, the scout, came carrying the cluster on a pole;
he anticipated seeing the Grape Whose wine would console
creation.²⁹
- 31 Joshua bar Nun anticipated Him—he who represents the power of
His name;³⁰

Mosaic covenant. He thus anticipates the sacrament of baptism as well as the Eucharist; cf. Saber, *Typologie*, esp. 87–89.

25. Cf. Gen. 19. Chastity (*qdšwt'*) might also be translated as "holiness." For Ephrem, as for other early Syriac authors, however, the term acquired a technical significance specifying chastity within marriage. Throughout the present translation this word and related words on the root *qdš* are rendered in this encratite sense.

26. On Aaron's staff, cf. Exod. 7.8–13. The word rendered "reptile" (*tnyn*), used in Pes. Exod. 7.11f., may also mean dragon, as in the Pes. supplements to Daniel; i.e., Bel and the Dragon. The latter sense is more appropriate for the creature that "swallowed" Adam and Eve. Further, cf. Nat. 4.117f. and 8.3. On the reference to Eve, cf. Yousif, Croix, 44.

27. Cf. Num. 21.4–9.

28. Cf. Exod. 34.29–35. This passage was of considerable interest to Greek Christians of a Platonic bent; cf. Greg. Nys. vit. Mos. For Ephrem, light and fire are especially associated with the presence of the Holy Spirit and hence play a role in both baptism and the Eucharist; cf. Nat. 4.88.

29. Cf. Num. 13.23f. The cluster (*sgwl'*) and the Grape (*twtyr'*, also a cluster, but smaller than the *sgwl'*) are important Christological symbols in both Ephrem and Aphrahat. They are closely associated with the True Vine and the Tree of Life, cf. Murray, Symbols, 95–130. On this specific passage and its relation to iconography, cf. *ibid.* 119, nn. 3f.

30. Joshua and Jesus are identical names in Syriac, as in Hebrew. Ephrem assumes that both proper names and the designations of objects in the natural world may have innate symbolic significance. A more complex example of Ephrem's association of Joshua and Jesus is in his polemic against astrology in CH 4.18, where Josh. 10.12–15 is invoked typologically to show Christ's power over the heavenly bodies. Further on the name of Jesus, cf. HdF 6.17 and the discussion in Hausherr, Noms, 64–72. On the relation of language to Ephrem's general theory of symbolism, cf. Murray, Theory, 9–14; on the relation of name to nature or substance, cf. Noujaim, Essai, esp. 30f.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- if by His name he is thus magnified, how much more would he be
exalted by His birth!
- 32 That Joshua who also plucked and carried with him some of the
fruits
anticipated the Tree of Life Who would give His all life-giving fruit
to taste.³¹
- 33 Rahab beheld Him; for if the scarlet thread
saved her by a symbol from [divine] wrath, by a symbol she tasted
the truth.³²
- 34 Elijah yearned for Him and without having seen the Son on earth,
he believed and increased his prayers that he might ascend and see
Him in heaven.³³
- 35 Moses and Elijah looked for Him; the humble one³⁴ ascended from
the depth,
and the zealous one came down from the height, and they saw the
Son in the middle.³⁵
- 36 They represented a symbol of His coming: Moses was a type for the
dead,
and Elijah a type for the living who will fly to meet Him when He
comes.
- 37 Because the dead have tasted death, He will repair them first,
but those not yet buried will be snatched up to meet Him at the
end.³⁶
- 38 Who will bring me to the end of enumerating the just men who
anticipated the Son, whose number cannot be encompassed by our
weak mouth?
- 39 Pray for me, my friends, that I may be strengthened once more
to set forth their qualities again in another account as much as I am
able.
- 40 Who is able to glorify the true Son Who rises for us,
Whom just men yearned to see in their lifetimes?

31. Cf. Num. 13. 1–24; Deut. 1.22–25.

32. Josh. 2.18–21, 6. 17–25.

33. 2 Kgs. 2.1–18.

34. I.e., Moses, cf. Num. 12.3.

35. At the transfiguration, Mark 9.2–8 et par., Moses comes up from Sheol while Elijah descends from on high to meet Jesus “in the middle,” i.e., on the mountain on earth, cf. Teixidor, *Muerte*, 98f.

36. 1 Thess. 4.16f. (Pes. 4.17).

HYMN 1

- 41 Adam anticipated Him Who is the Lord of the Cherubim³⁷
and was able to have him enter and dwell near the boughs of the
Tree of Life.
- 42 Abel yearned for him to come in his days,
so that instead of the lamb he sacrificed, he might see the Lamb of
God.³⁸
- 43 Eve looked for Him, for the shame of women was great,
but He would be able to clothe them not in leaves but rather in the
glory they had shed.³⁹
- 44 The symbol of the tower that many built envisages One Who would
come down and build upon the earth a Tower that goes up to
heaven.⁴⁰
- 45 Even the type of the ark of animals envisages our Lord,
Who would build the holy church in which souls take refuge.⁴¹
- 46 In the days of Peleg the earth was divided into seventy tongues;⁴²
he anticipated that One Who would divide the earth by tongues for
His apostles.⁴³
- 47 The earth that the Flood drowned called her Lord silently;
He came down and opened baptism by which people were drawn
out to heaven.
- 48 Seth and Enosh and Kenan were named sons of God;⁴⁴
they anticipated the Son of God, for they were brothers to Him in
mercy.
- 49 Slightly less than one thousand years Methuselah lived;
he anticipated the Son Who gives eternal life as an inheritance.⁴⁵

37. The Cherubim posted at the gate of Eden to keep Adam from the Tree of Life, Gen. 3.24, is subject to Christ. Further on this theme, cf. Graffin, Cherubim.

38. Cf. Gen. 4.4. Abel provides a eucharistic type as one who sacrifices a lamb. Elsewhere, Cruc. 2.8.9, he is a double type since he is also a victim, cf. Graffin, Eucharistie, 97f.

39. The Syriac word "shame" (*ḡwrsy*) also means "nakedness." The fig leaves are a garment of shame woven by Eve; cf. Gen. 3.7. Only the new garment woven by Mary, i.e., the body of Jesus, will be adequate; cf. HdP 2.7, 4.5, Nat. 4.187f.

40. Cf. Gen. 11.1–9, Virg 40.11–13, Murray, Symbols, 222ff. and Kronholm, Motifs, 210–14.

41. Cf. HdF 49.4; Christ builds the church of which Noah's ark is the type; the dove and olive branch are symbols of baptism. For Noah as a type of Christ, cf. Kronholm, Motifs, 172–214.

42. Cf. Gen. 10.25. In Syriac as in Hebrew the root *plg* means "to divide."

43. Cf. Acts 2.

44. Cf. Gen. 5.6–14.

45. Gen. 5.27. Literally the Syriac has "unceasing life from everlasting" here rendered "eternal life."

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 50 For their sake by a hidden symbol, grace was asking
their Lord to come in their lifetimes to fill their needs.
- 51 For it is the Holy Spirit, Who for their sake by quiet contemplation
in them
stirs them up to see by Her the Savior for whom they yearned.⁴⁶
- 52 The soul of just men perceived the Son, the Medicine of life,
and she⁴⁷ eagerly desired that in her days He would come and she
would taste His sweetness.
- 53 Enoch yearned for Him, and without having seen the Son on earth,
he increased his faith and was made righteous so that he ascended to
see Him in heaven.⁴⁸
- 54 Who will refuse grace? For this gift that the ancients
did not acquire [even] with great effort has come freely to the people
of today.
- 55 Even Lamech looked for the Compassionate One to come and
console him
from his labor and the work of his hands and from the earth that the
Just One cursed.⁴⁹
- 56 But Lamech saw his son Noah in whom the symbols of the Son are
portrayed;
instead of this distant Lord the nearby symbol consoled him.
- 57 Even Noah yearned to see Him, for he tasted of his benefits:
if [even] His type preserved the animals, how much [more] does He
save souls.⁵⁰
- 58 Noah anticipated Him—Noah who surmised that by Him the ark
stood still;
if His type saved in this way, how much more will He save in His
reality.⁵¹

46. Cf. Rom. 8.26. Based on the grammatical convention that "spirit" (*rwḥ*) is feminine in Syriac, early Syriac Christian literature developed a rich feminine imagery for the Holy Spirit. Glimpses of this tradition survive in Ephrem; cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 312–20.

47. I.e., the soul.

48. Gen. 5.24.

49. Gen. 5.29.

50. Ephrem's interpretative technique here, typified by the phrase "how much more" is analogous to the Rabbinic method of "*qal w boher*"—from light to heavy—an argument proceeding from a lesser to a greater example; cf. H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (Philadelphia, 1945), 93–98.

51. Cf. Gen. 8.4. The word here rendered "reality" (*qrwm*) may be used to render the Greek ὑπόστασις. It is used by Ephrem as a technical term with several different senses; cf.

HYMN 1

- 59 By the Spirit Abraham perceived that the birth of the Son was
distant;
for his own sake he eagerly desired even in his day to see Him.⁵²
- 60 Isaac who tasted of His salvation yearned to see Him;
if His sign is saved in this way, how much more will He be saved in
His truth.⁵³
- 61 Today the Watchers⁵⁴ were rejoicing that the Awakener came to
awaken us;
who will go to sleep on this night on which all Creation is awake?
- 62 Since by sins Adam let the sleep of death enter Creation,⁵⁵
the Awakener came down to awaken us from the slumber of sin.
- 63 Let us keep vigil as do the greedy who contemplate money lent on
interest,
who stay awake often at night to calculate principal and interest.
- 64 Awake and thinking is the thief who dug a hiding place in the
ground for his sleep;⁵⁶
his wakefulness is all [for] this: to increase lamentation for those who
sleep.
- 65 Keeping vigil also is the glutton in order to eat more and to suffer
agony;
his vigil was torment for him since he did not eat with moderation.
- 66 Keeping vigil also is the merchant; at night he wearies his fingers
to calculate how much [interest] came [in on] his mina and whether
he doubled and tripled his obol.
- 67 Keeping vigil also is the rich [man] whose sleep mammon pursues;
his dogs are sleeping, but he is keeping his treasure from thieves.
- 68 Keeping vigil also is the worrier whose sleep has been swallowed up
by his worries,

Beck, *Theologie*, 13–18; idem, *Reden*, 4–8; and Noujaim, “Essai.” In this instance it is simply synonymous with *b-šrr*, “in truth, in reality.”

52. Cf. John 8.56. The Syriac reads “even if” rather than “even.”

53. Here rather than “type” and “reality” (*ṭwps* and *qnwym*) as in strophe 58, Ephrem uses “sign” and “truth” (*nyš* and *šrr*) with essentially the same meaning. On *nyš*, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 256–60.

54. I.e., the angels, cf. CJ1.8 and note ad loc.

55. Beck retains the plural, “sins,” with the earlier mss. and interprets this as an indication of Ephrem’s undeveloped notion of Original Sin. Further on Ephrem’s doctrine of the Fall, cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 111–31.

56. Cf. Matt. 25.18.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- whose death stands at his pillows, and he watches, worried, for years.
- 69 It is Satan who teaches, my brothers, wakefulness for the sake of wakefulness,
so that we might be asleep to virtues, vigilant and wakeful to vices.
- 70 Even Judas Iscariot kept vigil an entire night,⁵⁷
and he sold the blood of the Just One Who purchased the entire creation.
- 71 The sons of darkness, who stripped off and shed the Shining One,
put on darkness,⁵⁸
and with silver the thief sold the Creator of silver.
- 72 Even the Pharisees, sons of darkness, were awake an entire night;
the dark ones kept vigil to conceal the incomprehensible Light.⁵⁹
- 73 Keep vigil as bright ones on this bright night;
for even if its color is black, still it is splendid in its power.
- 74 One who splendidly watches and prays in the darkness
is wrapped in hidden brilliance in the midst of this visible darkness.
- 75 The way of life of the hateful one who stands in the daylight is the
way of a son of darkness,
so that even if clothed by light without, he would be girt by
darkness within.
- 76 Indeed, my friends, let us not forget in our wakefulness:
illicit is the vigil of one who does not watch as he should.
- 77 Deep sleep is the vigil of one who watches unworthily;
its opposite, too, is the vigil of one who watches unchastely.
- 78 The vigil of a jealous man is an abundance full of emptiness,
and his watch is a matter full of scorn and disgrace.
- 79 If an angry man keeps watch, his vigil is disturbed by anger,
and his watch itself becomes full of wrath and curses.
- 80 If a garrulous man keeps vigil, his mouth becomes a thoroughfare
useful for the destroying [spirits] but wearisome for prayers.
- 81 If a discerning man keeps vigil, he chooses one of two:
either he sleeps sweetly, or he keeps vigil righteously.

57. The night of his betrayal of Jesus? Cf. Mark 14.32–52 et par.

58. Garment imagery is frequent in Syriac, cf. Brock, *Clothing*.

59. The trial before the Sanhedrin is apparently meant, cf. Mark 14.53–65 et par.

HYMN 1

- 82 Serene⁶⁰ is the night on which shines forth the Serene One Who
came to give us serenity.
Do not allow anything that might disturb it to enter upon our
watch.
- 83 Let the path of the ear be cleared; let the sight of the eye be
chastened;
let the contemplation of the heart be sanctified; let the speech of the
mouth be purified.
- 84 Mary today has hidden in us the leaven from the house of
Abraham;⁶¹
let us, therefore, love the poor as Abraham [loved] the needy.
- 85 Today she has cast rennet into us from the house of David, the
compassionate one;
let man have mercy on his persecutor as the son of Jesse on Saul.⁶²
- 86 The sweet salt of the prophets today is scattered among the peoples;
let us acquire by it a new taste by which the former people would
lose its flavor.⁶³
- 87 On this day of redemption let us speak a speech of interpretation;
let us not speak superfluous words, lest we be superfluous to [the
day].
- 88 This is the night of reconciliation; let us be neither wrathful nor
gloomy on it.
On this all-peaceful night let us be neither menacing nor boisterous.
- 89 This is the night of the Sweet One; let us be on it neither bitter nor
harsh.
On this night of the Humble One, let us be neither proud nor
haughty.
- 90 On this day of forgiveness let us not avenge offenses.
On this day of rejoicings let us not share sorrows.
- 91 On this sweet day let us not be vehement.
On this calm day let us not be quick-tempered.
- 92 On this day on which God came into the presence of sinners,

60 *špy*, here rendered "serene," may mean either calm or clear. Ephrem plays on the various senses of this root in this and the following strophes.

61. Cf. Matt. 13.33 (Pes.)

62. For David's mercy on Saul, cf. 1 Sam 26. In cheesemaking rennet separates the curds from the whey; here it separates the merciful from those who lack mercy.

63. The apostles are the salt of the earth sent out over all the earth; cf. Mark 9.50 et par., and HdP 6.21 and the comments of Beck and Graffin in CSCO and SC editions.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- let not the just man exalt himself in his mind over the sinner.
- 93 On this day on which the Lord of all came among servants,
let the lords also bow down to their servants lovingly.
- 94 On this day when the Rich One was made poor for our sake,
let the rich man also make the poor man a sharer at his table.
- 95 On this day a gift came out to us without our asking for it;
let us then give alms to those who cry out and beg from us.
- 96 This is the day when the high gate opened to us for our prayers;
let us also open the gates to the seekers who have stayed but sought
[forgiveness].
- 97 This Lord of natures today was transformed contrary to His
nature;⁶⁴
it is not too difficult for us also to overthrow our evil will.
- 98 Bound is the body by its nature for it cannot grow larger or smaller;
but powerful is the will for it may grow to all sizes.⁶⁵
- 99 Today the Deity imprinted itself on humanity,
so that humanity might also be cut into the seal of Deity.⁶⁶

64. Here Ephrem states one of his central theological themes, the miraculous transformation (*šwḥlḥp'*) in the incarnation of the Creator, who is by nature unchangeable. The One becomes many for the sake of self-revelation to the creatures God loves. Cf. de Halleux, *Mar Ephrem*, 45–47. Also *Virg* 4.5–6, 25.12, 28.11.

65. Freedom of the will is important to Ephrem and enters often into his polemics against other beliefs; cf. T. B. Mansour, "La défense éphrémienne de la liberté contre les doctrines marcionite, bardesanite et manichéenne," *OCP* 50 (1984), 331–46.

66. The verb here rendered "imprinted" (*tb'*) belongs to the context of coinage, seals and signets. Hence *šbt*, usually rendered "decorate" or "embellish," is here translated "cut into" since *šbt* is a denominative verb from *šbtā*, "ornament or embellishment," but also "carved work, gem of a ring," i.e., intaglio; cf. Margoliouth 473a; *gemma annuli*, Payne Smith 3360. The language of seals and sealing (σφραγίς, σφραγίζω) is frequently used in Greek Christian literature, especially in relation to the sacrament of baptism; Ephrem has that use as well, cf. *Virg* 4–7. But here his meaning is that the incarnation has divinized human nature in a way similar to Athanasius' statement, "[The Word of God] became human that we might become divine." *Ath. de inc.* 54. Further on Ephrem's use of *tb'* and its derivatives, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 254–58.

2

In this hymn Ephrem delineates an Old Testament basis for the Christian claim that Jesus is the Messiah, apparently in response to Jewish objections. He begins with a tripartite claim for Jesus as inheritor of the threefold leadership of the Old Testament people of God: He has inherited the lyre of the prophets, the hyssop of the priests and the diadem of the kings (str. 2). Most important here, however, is the kingship (str. 3–23). Like all kings, Jesus is recognized by cities, and like Solomon, he is offered a crown by his mother (str. 3–5), but his royal dignity is as the Son of the Ruler of all Creation (str. 6). The great exaltation of his mother is the result of his choice of her (str. 7–9). Ephrem is on the defensive with respect to the virgin birth (str. 11), sustaining his view in part by claiming that in the guise of an old man the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary while she was at prayer (str. 17–20). Yet the theological justification of Mary's virginity rests on typology: Christ is the second Adam; she is the second Eve (str. 7, 12). Finally, the claim to Davidic kingship is an historical assertion. It rests on Micah's messianic prophecy related to Bethlehem (Ephrata) and the divergent claims of Matthew and Luke that Mary and Joseph, respectively, were from Davidic stock. Ephrem defends a double Davidic heritage for Jesus; the one in the flesh, through Mary; the other, for the sake of the name, through Joseph (str. 13–16). He portrays the incarnation as a divine pedagogical device (str. 21). In the last strophes he takes the offensive, claiming that the Davidic kingship is extinct in Israel as a divine punishment, presumably for disbelief in Jesus the Messiah (str. 22–23).

2

To the melody "Heavenly hosts"

1 In the heavenly host sent for praise,

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

in the glorious age appointed⁶⁷ for salvation,
and in the blessed day preserved for rejoicings,
I have been made a partaker in love by Him—even I, and I have
burst into song.

With pure hymns I shall sing hallelujahs to Him,
and with a holy melody I shall sing to Him;
this child who saved us I shall praise.

*Refrain: Make me worthy, even me, to offer praise to You on
Your lyre on the day of Your birth.*

- 2 The lyre of the prophets who proclaimed Him, singing before Him,
and the hyssop of the priests who loved Him, eagerly desiring his
presence,
and the diadem of kings who handed it down in succession
belong to this Lord of virgins, for even His mother is a virgin.
He Who is King gives the kingdom to all.
He Who is Priest gives pardon to all.
He Who is the Lamb gives nourishment to all.
- 3 The cities of a king are all accustomed
to offer crowns of gold in their hands.
The cities of Judah are crowns endowed with speech, my Lord.
To You, Jesus, they offer crowns in their mouths—
Bethlehem, Cana and Nazareth,
Bethany, Shechem and Samaria
and the worthy cities⁶⁸—and they crown You.
- 4 The first crown Your city will offer You [is]
two crowns at once: of Mary and Ephrata,⁶⁹
And then, in ranks, all the cities at once.
Behold! They offer You their crowns from what is Your own.
A king, my Lord, takes without giving.
Your glorious cities are plaiting a crown
and offering it for Your glory.

67. The Syriac verb *ršm* again evokes the image of seals, engraving or drawing, cf. Nat. 1.99 above, and Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 244f. and 256–59. It is usually rendered “engrave” or “draw” in the present translation.

68. Fortified cities (*krk'* as opposed to *mdynt'* in Nat. 2.3.1 and 3 above). The cities named here are possible pilgrimage cities in Ephrem's time; further, cf. Virg 16–23, 32–36.

69. Cf. Mic. 5.1–2.

HYMN 2

- 5 Let His mother worship Him; let her offer Him a crown.
For Solomon's mother made him king and crowned him.⁷⁰
He apostatized and lost his crown in battle.⁷¹
Behold the Son of David who glorified and crowned the House of
David!

For You have greatly magnified his throne,
and You have greatly exalted his tribe,
and his lyre You have extended everywhere.

- 6 Worthy of remembrance is the mother who gave birth to Him;
worthy of blessings is the bosom that bore Him.
[Worthy] too is Joseph, who by grace is called father
to the true Son, Him Whose Father is glorious,
Ruler of all Creation, Who was sent
for the sake of the sheep that was lost and had gone astray,⁷²
to bring it to the sheepcote and have it enter in.
- 7 "Most of all those healed, I rejoice, for I conceived Him;
most of all those magnified by Him, He has magnified me, for I
gave birth to Him.

I am about to enter into His living Paradise,
and in the place in which Eve succumbed, I shall glorify Him.
For of all created women, He was most pleased with me,⁷³
[and] He willed that I should be mother to Him,
and it pleased Him that He should be a child to me."

- 8 Bethlehem thanks You that she was found worthy to give birth to
You:

the saying of Micah she plaits into your crown.⁷⁴
The prophecy that became a garden of blossoms
will call the prophets and kings to help her with her crown.
For Moses himself bears the types,
and Isaiah [bears] the symbols that flourish,
and [like] lilies [are] parables in all of scripture.

- 9 "By the mouth of my glorious ones⁷⁵ I give thanks that I received

70. Cf. 1 Kgs. 1.11–40.

71. Cf. 1 Kgs. 11 et par.

72. Cf. Matt. 18.12–14, et par.

73. Luke 1.28. The speaker in this strophe is Mary.

74. Cf. Mic. 5.2.

75. The "glorious" or "victorious" (*nyh*) are saints, perhaps martyrs or ascetics. They are to be at the highest level of paradise, above the penitents and the just, and closest to the

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

the child, the Son of the Hidden One, as He emerged into
revelation.

To a great height He lifted me with my saints
so that I might glorify Him in the broad and vast heaven
full of His glory but unable
to contain within itself the greatness⁷⁶
of the One who bent down and became small in the manger.”

- 10 Heavenly voices announced to those below;⁷⁷
the ears of earthly beings drank You in with the tidings—
[You,] a new Spring that heavenly ones opened
for the earthly who thirsted for life but did not taste it,
[You,] O Fount untasted by Adam,
Who opened twelve rational springs,⁷⁸
and life filled the earth.

- 11 Joseph worshipped You; a crown he offered to You—
this troubled just [man] whom the angels reassured.⁷⁹
So that you might increase his reward, he rescued You in his arms.⁸⁰
For who could convince a just man
to carry the hateful son of adultery
and to be pursued from one place to another?

- 12 Teach me, my Lord, how and why
from a virgin womb it was fitting for You to shine forth for us.
Was He a type of splendid Adam [taken]
from the virgin earth that had not been worked until he was
formed?⁸¹

Why then was it necessary that she, a daughter of David,
be betrothed to Joseph⁸² and that then Your birth
from her would be without man?

Shekinah, the presence of God, cf. HdF 2.11. Since the speaker is Bethlehem, its “glorious ones” may be the innocents killed by Herod, hence taken to be martyrs, as Beck has suggested, cf. Beck, *Paradies*, 19–21.

76. Behind Ephrem’s image is the concept of God as ἀχώρητος, “uncontainable,” frequently found in the Greek apologists, cf. e.g. Just. dial. 127.2 (MG 6.772B), Thphl. Ant. Autol. 1.5 (MG 6.1032A).

77. Cf. Luke 2.13 f.

78. The twelve apostles; Ephrem rests here on Jewish traditions that the rock struck by Moses produced twelve streams for the twelve tribes, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 208–10.

79. Cf. Matt. 1.18–21.

80. Cf. Matt. 2.14.

81. Cf. Gen. 2.5.

82. Cf. Matt. 1.18 et par.

HYMN 2

- 13 The succession of kings is written in the name of men instead of women.
Joseph, a son of David,⁸³ betrothed to a daughter of David,⁸⁴
for the child could not be registered in the name of His mother.
He became, therefore, Joseph's offspring without seed,
and His mother's offspring without man,
and by the two of them He bound Himself to their people,
so that among the kings He is written, Son of David.
- 14 It was not fitting that from the seed of Joseph He be born,
nor without Joseph that from Mary He be conceived.
He was not registered by the name of Mary, who gave birth to Him,
but Joseph, who registered, did not register his [own] seed.
Without the body of Joseph, He was united with his name;
without the betrothed of Mary, He sprang forth, her Son.
He was Lord to David and son.⁸⁵
- 15 Moses calls the wife of a man the bride;
the bridegroom who has not taken her, he calls husband, even him,⁸⁶
lest the succession of the Son of David be broken.
Without a man, indeed, how can He be counted the Son of David?
She considers her bridegroom a husband;
also our Lord acknowledged Himself in their lineage,
for they call Him Son of David, and He did not deny [it].
- 16 Even an adopted son is called a man's son
although he is alien to his lineage and his people,
but because he is pleased with him, he is an acceptable heir.
Who then will doubt concerning the birth of the body of our Savior
that by this daughter of David He was conceived,
and in the arms of the son of David He was clasped,
and in the town of David He was worshipped?⁸⁷
- 17 What indeed was the pure woman doing at the moment

83. Cf. Matt. 1.20.

84. Cf. Luke 1.27. Ephrem's emphasis on the double Davidic descent of Jesus occurs also in his commentary on the Diatesseron; contrary to views held formerly by von Harnack and Vööbus, then, Ephrem provides evidence of Tatian's concern for the Davidic descent of Jesus, cf. L. Leloir, "Éphrem et l'ascendance davidique du Christ," SP (TU 63), 389-94.

85. Cf. Matt. 22.41-46.

86. Cf. Gen. 29.21; Deut. 22.23f.

87. Luke 2.4, 11.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- when Gabriel was sent down to her?⁸⁸
 She saw him perhaps at the moment of prayer,
 for Daniel was also at prayer when he saw Gabriel,⁸⁹
 for prayer is next of kin to good tidings.
 It is right that they should delight one another
 as Mary did Elizabeth, her next of kin.⁹⁰
- 18 The dove bore good tidings for prayer.⁹¹
 By Abraham's prayer good tidings proliferated.⁹²
 Hezekiah's prayer hastened and proclaimed good tidings to him.⁹³
 The centurion's good tidings caused his prayers to be joyful.⁹⁴
 and on the roof terrace Simon was made joyful,⁹⁵
 And Zechariah [at] the reward⁹⁶ of his incense;
 his good tidings came because of his incense.⁹⁷
- 19 All good tidings came to the harbor of petition;
 this greatest of all good tidings, the cause of all rejoicing,
 found Mary at prayer and eagerly desired her.
 For Gabriel, inhabiting an honorable old man,⁹⁸
 entered and greeted her so that she would not tremble,
 so that the modest girl would not see
 a youthful face and be sad.
- 20 To two pure old men and to a virgin girl,⁹⁹
 to them alone Gabriel was sent with good tidings.
 In the will their natures are similar and resemble one another.
 The virgin and the barren woman and Daniel the faithful:
 One brought forth the revelation of the word,
 and the other a voice for the wilderness,

88. Lit. "was sent, flew and came down." Cf. Luke 1.26.

89. Cf. Dan. 9.20f.

90. Cf. Luke 1.40.

91. Of Noah, cf. Gen. 8.11.

92. Cf. Gen. 15.

93. Cf. Isa. 38.5.

94. Cf. Acts 10.3.

95. Cf. Acts 10.9f., not Matt. 16.17, pace Beck.

96. Unpointed, "roof terrace" and "reward" are the same Syriac word.

97. Cf. Luke 1.9–11; cf. Exod. 37.

98. Gabriel takes on various guises, human and otherwise, to appear to humans, according to non-canonical sources, cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, VII, 172. If Ephrem is drawing on an established tradition of Gabriel's appearance as an old man, it is otherwise unattested. This probably reflects his own particular concern to defend Mary's virginity.

99. Zechariah, Daniel and Mary.

HYMN 2

and the virgin the Word of the Most High.

- 21 Lest He bewilder the onlookers by His greatness,
He drew Himself up from all the land of the Hebrews
and from all Judah and all Bethlehem
until He filled a small womb,
and as if He were a seed in our garden
or a small flash of light for our pupil,
He shone forth and diffused and filled the earth.

- 22 And so that His lineage would be well-explained—whose son He
was—

Luke and Matthew traced his lineage:¹⁰⁰

Son of Abraham they reckoned Him—and of David and of Joseph,
so that by the learned mouths of two witnesses—
and of the blind man who called Him Son of David—¹⁰¹
let the reproach increase for those who hate Him,
and let the crown become greater for those who love Him.

23. The line of Judah, then, never had been cut off,
its sceptre had never been cut short.
Behold, by our Lord, it has been chastised and thus brought to an
end,
and the great length of time testifies he has confounded it.
There is no more numbering of generations.
The line reached You and stood still,
for You are the Son of David, and there is no other.

100. Matt. 1.16, Luke 3.23–38.

101. Mark 10.46–52 et par.

3

This is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving for the incarnation. By addressing both God the Father and Christ under a series of titles, Ephrem stresses the paradoxical nature of the incarnation. His choice of imagery achieves an intricate interplay of philosophical ideas with metaphors drawn from everyday life, many of them found also in scripture. Although Ephrem occasionally refers directly to New Testament events (e.g., str. 2, 18), most of the theological imagery of this hymn is not explicitly scriptural. Early in the hymn (str. 3–7) Ephrem shows his acquaintance with philosophical notions of God. God, who by nature is unable to be grasped even by the mind, freely chose to become limited, small and accessible to us by the incarnation; God went so far as even to be bound, fettered and crucified. The unchangeable God's willingness to submit to change has revived the full dignity of our humanity.

After setting forth this theology of the incarnation, Ephrem proceeds to a series of metaphors for redemption: light breaking into darkness (str. 8–9), relief from indebtedness (str. 10), awakening from sleep (str. 19), rescue from drowning (str. 19). God is like a tree or vine giving fruit (str. 15, 17); he is a farmer, ploughman, shepherd, physician, master builder and musician (the last with strong Orphic overtones; str. 14–16, 19–20). In the incarnation God makes a tabernacle (str. 7), palace, temple, garment, armor (str. 20) in which to dwell.

3

To the melody "He consoled with promises"

- 1 Blessed be the Child Who today delights Bethlehem.
Blessed be the Newborn Who today made humanity young again.
Blessed be the Fruit Who bowed Himself down for our hunger.
Blessed be the Gracious One Who suddenly enriched

HYMN 3

all of our poverty and filled our need.

Blessed be He Whose mercy inclined Him to heal our sickness.

Refrain: My Lord, blessed be Your Child,¹⁰²

Who raised to honor our hardness of heart.

- 2 Thanks to the Fountainhead sent for our salvation.

Thanks to the One Who violated the sabbath in its fulfillment.¹⁰³

Thanks to the One Who rebuked leprosy and it remained not.¹⁰⁴

Fever also saw Him and departed.¹⁰⁵

Thanks to the Compassionate One Who bore our pain.¹⁰⁶

Glory to Your coming that restored humankind to life.

- 3 Glory to that One Who came to us by His First-born.¹⁰⁷

Glory to that Silent One Who spoke by means of His Voice.

Glory to that Sublime One Who was seen by means of His Dawn.

Glory to the Spiritual One Who was well-pleased

that His Child should become a body so that through Him His
power might be felt

and the bodies of His kindred might live again.¹⁰⁸

- 4 Glory to that Hidden One Whose Child was revealed.

Glory to that Living One Whose Son became a mortal.

Glory to that Great One Whose Son descended and became small.

Glory to that One Power Who fashioned Him,

the Image of His greatness and Form for His hiddenness.

With the eye and the mind—with both of them we saw Him.¹⁰⁹

- 5 Glory to that Hidden One Who even to the mind

102. Jesus is addressed as child of God, $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$ in the *Didache*, 9–10, probably also of Syrian origin, and in Hippolytus' *Apos. Trad.* 7. The title may also mean servant of God, with reference to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

103. Cf. Mark 2.23–28 et par.

104. Cf. Mark 1.41f. et par.

105. Cf. Mark 1.29–31 et par.

106. Cf. Isa. 52.4f.

107. Here and throughout the verse, the utter ineffability of the Father is stressed. Although Ephrem does not use the term, this is a Logos theology; cf. Beck, *Reden*, 85f.

108. Through the incarnation of the Child of God, human beings become kindred of the Child of God, thus becoming receptive to the power of God and receiving life. The notion is, again, fundamentally of a Logos theology.

109. God the Father fashioned (*swr*) the Son as his image. For the use of this term in Ephrem, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 244–51. Likewise, for Athanasius, *Ath. adv. Ar.* 3.23.5, the Son is the “perfect,” express image of the Father, but the Father did not “fashion” his image, cf. *Ath. adv. Ar.* 1.13.58.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

is utterly imperceptible to those who investigate Him.¹¹⁰

But by His grace through [His] humanity

a nature never before fathomed is [now] perceived.¹¹¹

His hands bound and fettered, His feet nailed and fastened,

by His [own] will He clothed Himself with a body for those who seized Him.¹¹²

6 Blessed is He Whom freedom crucified, when He permitted it.

Blessed is He Whom also the wood bore, when He allowed it.

Blessed is He Whom even the grave enclosed, when He set limits to Himself.

Blessed is He Whose will brought Him

to the womb and to birth and to the bosom and to growth.

Blessed is He Whose changes revived our humanity.

7 Blessed is He Who engraved our soul and adorned¹¹³ and betrothed her to Him[self].

Blessed is He Who made our body a Tabernacle for His hiddenness.¹¹⁴

Blessed is He Who with our tongue interpreted His secrets.

Let us give thanks to that Voice Whose praise on our lyre¹¹⁵

and Whose power on our kithara¹¹⁶ are sung.

110. Those who are arrogant enough to investigate God will be utterly incapable of perceiving him. Ephrem's sustained polemic against the "investigators" and the "inquirers" is directed against the Arians, who seek to understand the mysterious essence of God. The proper role of humans is to ponder the symbols God has placed in scripture and nature and the sacraments rather than trying to analyze the nature of God. Cf. de Halleux, *Mar Ephrem*, 42–45; Beck, *Theologie*, 62–80; Murray, *Symbols*, 14–20; Brock, *Luminous*, 10–36.

111. By the incarnation even the divine nature becomes accessible to human beings, but not for investigation!

112. Paradoxically, the incarnate Christ is physically helpless, but he became incarnate by his own will for those who lay hold of him—*ḥd* is to be taken in both the physical sense (the seizing of Jesus by his persecutors) and in the mental sense (those who grasp the meaning of Christ, in a positive sense).

113. As in Nat. 1.99, *ṣm*, "engraved," suggests the image of a gemstone or seal, but *šbt* is here rendered "adorned" because of the bridal imagery.

114. The incarnation is like God's presence in the tabernacle.

115. The kinora (*knwr*) or lyre was associated by Greek pagans with Orpheus, by Jews with David, and by Christians with both David and Jesus; cf. P. C. Finney, "Orpheus-David: A Connection in Iconography between Greco-Roman Judaism and Early Christianity?" *JJA* 5 (1978), 6–15. Strophe 16 of this hymn clearly invokes Orphic ideas of the taming of wild animals as a metaphor for salvation.

116. Or zither (Syriac, *qytr*). Ephrem is fond of musical imagery, as are some of the Greek Patristic writers, particularly Clement of Alexandria; cf. Clem. prot. 1; cf. T. Halton, "Clement's lyre: a broken string, a new song," *The Second Century* 3 (1983), 177–99. Instrumental music in a liturgical context is, however, rejected by all Greek and Latin Christian writers who mention

HYMN 3

The peoples came together to listen to His melodies.

- 8 Glory to the Son of the Gracious One, rejected by the sons of the Evil One.

Glory to the Son of the Just One, crucified by the sons of the Wicked One.

Glory to the One who released us and was bound in place of us all.

Glory to that One who pledged Himself to pay the debt.

Glory to the Beautiful One Who portrayed us in His similitudes.

Glory to that Serene One Who looked not at our blemishes.

- 9 Glory to that One Who begot His Light in the darkness, and [the darkness] was hidden by its vices that concealed its secrets, but [the Light] stripped off and took away from us the garment of blemishes.¹¹⁷

Glory to the Heavenly One who mingled

His salt with our mind, His milk with our souls.

His body became bread to revive our mortality.

- 10 Thanks be to the Rich One who paid the debt in place of us all, something He did not borrow, but He signed and became indebted for us again.

By His yoke He brought away from us the shackles that held us captive.

Glory to the Judge Who was judged,

but He had His Twelve sit down for the judgment of the tribes.

Yet He was found guilty by the ignorant, the scribes of that people.

- 11 Glory to that One Who never before could be measured by us; our heart is too small for Him and our intellect too weak.

He dazzles our smallness by the wealth of His forms.¹¹⁸

Glory to the All-knowing Who cast Himself down,

and asks to hear and to learn what He already knew

to reveal by His questions the treasure of His benefits.

it; cf. Quasten, *Musik*; E. Ferguson, "The Active and Contemplative Lives: the Patristic Interpretation of Some Musical Terms," *SP* XVI, 15–23; James W. McKinnon, *Music in Early Christian Literature*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge, 1987). Ephrem apparently differed from his Greek and Roman counterparts since a sixth-century source depicts him playing the lyre while a woman's choir sings; cf. McVey, *Singing*.

117. The use of imagery of clothing is common in Syriac Christian literature, but the more usual notion is that the garment of light or of glory is lost by Adam and Eve and regained through Christ; cf. Nat. 23.13, Brock, *Clothing*, and Saber, *Theologie*, 152–57.

118. God has many forms (*pwrtin*), not by nature but by choice. He is the One, who enters into multiplicity for our sake, cf. Nat. 1.97.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 12 Let us worship the One who enlightened our intellect by His
teaching
and prepared in our hearing a path for His words.
Let us thank the One Who gave to taste His Fruit on our tree.
Thanks be to the One Who sent His Heir
to draw us toward Himself by Him and to make us heirs with Him.
Thanks be to that Gracious One, the cause of all our virtues.
- 13 Blessed is He Who did not reproach, for He was the Gracious One.
Blessed is He Who did not avert His gaze, for He is also the Just
One.
Blessed is He Who was silent and reproached: He restored life by
both.
Powerful is his silence, and reproachful.
Gentle is His strength even though He accuses,
for He reproached the False One, but He kissed the thief.
- 14 Glory to the Farmer, the Hidden One of our thought.
His seed fell on our earth and enriched our intellect.
Its harvest was a hundredfold¹¹⁹ for the storehouse of our souls.
Let us worship the One Who sat down and rested,
Who walked within the way, and He was the Way on the way¹²⁰
and the Gate¹²¹ of entry for those who enter the kingdom.
- 15 Blessed is the Shepherd Who became the sheep for our absolution.
Blessed is the Vineshoot that became the cup of our salvation.
Blessed also is the Cluster, the source of the medicine of life.
Blessed also is the Ploughman Who Himself became
the grain of wheat that was sown¹²² and the sheaf that was reaped.
He is the Master Builder Who became a tower for our refuge.¹²³
- 16 He is He Who Himself constructed the senses of our minds
so that we might sing on our lyre something that the mouth of the
bird
is unable to sing in its melodies.
Glory to the One Who saw that we had been pleased

119. Cf. Mark 4.20 et par.

120. Cf. John 4.6

121. Cf. John 10.7.

122. Cf. John 12.24.

123. On building images, cf. Vielhauer, *Oikodome*, esp. 49, 52–54, on the Odes of Solomon and Acts of Thomas.

HYMN 3

to resemble the animals in our rage and greed,
and [so] He descended and became one of us that we might become
heavenly.

- 17 Glory to Him Who never needs us to thank Him.

Yet He [became] needy for He loves us, and He thirsted for He
cherishes us.

And He asks us to give to Him so that He may give us even more.

His Fruit was mingled with our human nature

to draw us out toward Him Who bent down to us.

By the Fruit of the Root He will graft us onto His Tree.¹²⁴

- 18 Let us thank Him Who was beaten and Who saved us by His
wound.

Let us thank Him Who took away the curse by His thorns.

Let us thank Him Who killed death by His dying.

Let us thank Him Who was silent and vindicated us.¹²⁵

Let us thank Him Who cried out in death that had devoured us.¹²⁶

Blessed is He Whose benefits have laid waste the enemies of God.

- 19 Let us glorify Him Who watched and put to sleep our captor.

Let us glorify the One Who went to sleep and awoke our slumber.

Glory to God the Healer of human nature.

Glory to the One Who plunged in and sank

our evil into the depth and drowned our drowner.

Let us glorify with all our mouths the Lord of all means [of
salvation].

- 20 Blessed is the Physician¹²⁷ who descended and cut painlessly
and healed the sores with a mild Medicine.

His Child was the Medicine that takes pity on sinners.

Blessed is the One Who dwelt in the womb, and in it He built

124. In the second half of the verse, "He" is God the Father rather than the Son. The image of root and fruit is part of Ephrem's usual Trinitarian language for Father and Son; cf. Beck, *Reden*, 75–77.

125. Matt. 27.14 et par.

126. Matt. 27.50 et par.

127. Ephrem frequently characterizes Christ both as physician and as the medicine of life. The image is especially developed in CNis 26.3–7, 27.1 and CNis 34, where it is applied to Old Testament types and Christian bishops as well. Ephrem's use is firmly rooted in Syriac tradition, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 89–91, 199–204. Here, as in str. 17, Ephrem shifts the referent for "Him" without warning from Son to Father, so that Christ is the Physician in the first line, but the Child and the Medicine of the third line.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- a palace¹²⁸ in which to live, a temple¹²⁹ in which to be,
a garment in which to be radiant, and armor by which to conquer.
- 21 Blessed is the One Whom our mouth is not sufficient to thank,
Whose gift is too great for those gifted with speech.
Nor are the senses sufficient to give thanks for His grace.
for however much we thank Him, it is too little,
and because it is of no use for us to be silent and unnerved,
let our weaknesses return [to God] a song of thanksgiving.
- 22 Gracious One Who does not demand more than our strength,
how much was your servant judged by principal and interest—
he who did not give what was sufficient and withheld what he
owed?
Sea of glory without needs,¹³⁰
receive in Your graciousness a drop of thanksgiving,
for by Your gift You have moistened my tongue to praise You.

128. *bykl'* may be ■ palace or temple.

129. *nws'* from Greek ναός, temple.

130. *dl' snyq* is the equivalent of ἀνεπίδεῖς of the Greek apologists, cf. Clem. str. 7.13, Meth. symp. proem., Ath. gent. 28, where God is said to be sufficient to Himself.

4

Although this hymn is primarily a nativity hymn celebrating the paradox of the incarnation, it also concerns the feasts of Easter and the Ascension (str. 31–32, 58–59). The primary theological and liturgical theme for the nativity is that the birthday of Christ resembles him in many ways, primarily in its compassion (str. 1–31). Ephrem develops this theme by an extended exegetical section contrasting the life-giving birthday of Christ with the death-dealing birthday of Herod as recounted by the synoptic gospels (Mark 6.21–19 et par.; str. 60–83). The primary theme for Easter is a paradox: the bait catches the fishermen (str. 35–47), and again, as by the wood, wine and rib we were conquered, so Christ conquers by those same means (str. 109–118), and the Lamb destroys Satan as the divine presence in the Ark destroyed the image of the Philistine god Dagon (112–118; cf. 1 Sam 5). The theme of the Ascension is both incarnational and eucharistic: Just as the infinite God was paradoxically present in the infant at the nativity, so also the unlimited God is present in the eucharistic elements (str. 84–96); just as the body of Christ was lifted up to heaven, so those who worthily receive the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist will be lifted up, spiritualized (str. 58, 97–108).

After alternating these three themes at greater length, Ephrem recapitulates them: 1) in winter when there is little light, the Light came (str. 119–20); like the barren earth, a virgin brought forth (str. 121–22); 2) the lamb born out of season tore apart the wolf (str. 123–29); 3) as the holy One dwelt bodily in Mary's womb, so he dwells spiritually in those who can perceive him (str. 130–42). Ephrem ends the hymn with a long and stirring litany of examples of the apparent powerlessness of the incarnate One with the reality of his hidden power (str. 146–213). The reality can be seen by those able to see it (str. 132–42; actually the metaphor of hearing is much more developed than seeing here); God is revealed to each according to the capacity of the creature (str. 199–202).

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

4

To the melody "Gather together, let us celebrate in the month of Nisan"

- 1 Blessed is Your day, my Lord, that first one
by which Your feastday is appointed.¹³¹

*Refrain: Blessed is He Who gave You to us without our asking,
so that by You we might thank Your Father for His gift.*

- 2 Your day resembles You, for it is a lover of human beings.
It is handed down and comes with all generations.
3 It is a day that goes to the end of life with old people
and returns with infants.
4 It is a day that renews itself by its love,
so that its strength will renew our old age.
5 When it has visited us and passed by and gone,
in its compassion Your day returns and visits us again.
6 It knows that humanity is needy.
The entire [day] resembles You in its concern for humanity.
7 The creation needs [the day's] spring;
for it, as for You, my Lord, all [creation] thirsts.
8 It is the day whose yoke rules over [all] times,
but length of time conquers all and will not pass it by.
9 For even kings and their images have passed away,¹³²
and the festivals to commemorate them have disappeared.
10 The power of Your day is like Your own;
it extends over the generations that have come and will come.
11 Your day resembles You for although it is one,
it branches out and becomes many¹³³ in order to be like You.
12 My Lord, on this, Your day, that is near to us,
we have seen Your birth, that distant one.

131. As in Nat. 2.1, the verb *ršm* carries the sense of engraving.

132. For the king's image, the Syriac *ywqn'*, the Greek *εἰκών* is used here. It is a word frequently used by Ephrem in a symbolic sense; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 240–44. The emperor's image represents the emperor himself and hence is paid respect. When the emperor's power passes away, that respect can no longer be demanded, as the exercise of the *damnatio memoriae* of a dead emperor demonstrated. In the following verse Ephrem contrasts this with God's power and its visible image, the feastday of Christmas/Epiphany.

133. The one birthday of Christ becomes many in its liturgical celebration. Hence it is like God, the One, Who became manifold for our sake; cf. de Halleux, *Mar Ephrem*, 45–47.

HYMN 4

- 13 Lord, let Your day be like You for us.
Let it be a means and a pledge of peace.
- 14 It is Your day that reconciled heaven and earth,
for on it the Heavenly One descends to the earthly ones.
- 15 Your day is able to reconcile
that Just One Who became angry at our sins.
- 16 Behold our sins are myriad! Forgive us on Your day
on which mercy shown forth upon the guilty.
- 17 My Lord, Your day is great; let it not be diminished by us.
Let it have mercy on our follies, as is its custom.
- 18 And, my Lord, if every day pours forth Your forgiveness,
how much more will it increase on this day!
- 19 All of the days acquire good things
from the treasury of Your glorious day.
- 20 All of the feastdays derive their beauty and are adorned
from the treasures of this feastday.
- 21 Your mercy pours forth to us, my Lord, on this day.
Make better known to us Your day than all the [other] days.
- 22 For great is the treasure house of Your birthday.
Let it be the one that makes recompense for debtors.
- 23 Greater is this day than every day,
for on it the Compassionate One came out to sinners.
- 24 A treasure of medicines is Your great day
on which the medicine of life shone forth for the severely wounded.
- 25 A storehouse of benefits is this day
on which the light broke forth upon our blindness.
- 26 Indeed He came bearing us to the bowl¹³⁴
from which plenitude will pour upon our hunger.
- 27 The early-maturing cluster is this day
in which the cup of salvation was hidden.
- 28 The first-born feastday is this day
that is first to conquer all the feastdays.
- 29 In the winter that robs the branches of fruit,
the Fruit sprang forth for us from the barren vine.
- 30 In the frost that stripped all the trees
a Shoot budded for us from the house of Jesse.

134. Word play on “bowl” (*kpt*) and hunger (*kpnwt*).

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 31 In January¹³⁵ when seed hides in the earth,
the Staff of life sprang up from the womb.
- 32 In April¹³⁶ when the seed springs up into the air,
the Sheaf propagated itself in the earth.
- 33 In Sheol Death mowed it down and consumed it,
but the Medicine of Life hidden in it burst through.
- 34 For in April when lambs bleat in the field,
into the womb He, the Passover Lamb, entered.
- 35 Into the stream from which fishermen come up,
the Fisher of all plunged, and He came up from it.¹³⁷
- 36 [At] the stream where Simon was catching his fish,
the Fisher of men¹³⁸ came up and caught him.
- 37 With the cross that catches all thieves,
He caught that thief for life.¹³⁹
- 38 By death the Living One emptied Sheol.¹⁴⁰
He tore it open and let entire throngs flee from it.
- 39 Tax collectors and prostitutes [are] unclean snares;
the Holy One caught the snares of the Deceitful One.
- 40 The sinner who had been a snare for men—
He made her an example for penitents.¹⁴¹

135. Conun = December–January.

136. Nisan, when Easter was celebrated, is sometimes used more loosely by Ephrem to mean the season of spring. Here Christ's death and resurrection are seen as conception and (re)birth. By an interesting play of paradox, Ephrem makes the nativity and Easter interchangeable: the birth is a resurrection, the resurrection a birth.

137. The image of Christ as a fisherman and fisher of men is rooted in his own words as reported by the synoptics, cf. Mark 1.16f. et par., to which Ephrem specifically alludes in the next verse here. Since the same word in Syriac, *ṣwd*, means both to fish and to hunt or trap, Ephrem's imagery in verses 35–50 is more continuous than a translation is able to show. Further on use of the image in Ephrem and the Syriac context, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 176–78; in early Christian literature more generally, cf. Dölger, *Ichthus*. For the special importance of the fish in pre-Christian Edessa, cf. Segal, *Edessa*, 53–55, and Drijvers, *Cults*, 79f.

138. Cf. Mark 1.16f. et par.

139. Cf. Luke 23.39–43. The “good thief” was especially interesting to Syriac Christians; their liturgy portrayed his predicament when arriving at the gates of paradise in advance of Christ, cf. Graffin, *Cherubin*.

140. Christ's victorious descent into Sheol to release the just, especially the prominent figures of the Old Testament, is a significant theme of Jewish Christianity that made its way quickly into the Syrian Christian environment; cf. Teixidor, *Descente*.

141. Cf. Luke 7.36–50.

HYMN 4

- 41 The shriveled fig tree that withheld its fruit¹⁴²
offered Zacchaeus as [its] fruit.¹⁴³
- 42 Fruit of its own nature it had not given,
but it gave one rational fruit.
- 43 His thirst made our Lord lean over the well,
but He caught the thirsty woman by the water that He requested.¹⁴⁴
- 44 He caught one soul out of the spring,
with her He caught the entire city.
- 45 The Holy One caught twelve fishermen,
with them He caught the whole creation.
- 46 The Iscariot slipped away from among His nets;
upon his neck fell the noose.
- 47 The snare of the All-reviving catches for life,
and one who slips away from it, slips away from life.
- 48 And who is able to enumerate for me
the various benefits hidden in You, my Lord?
- 49 How much is my thirsty mouth able to lap up
from within the spring of the Deity?
- 50 Grant us today the voice of our petition.
May our prayer in words be in deeds.
- 51 My Master, make us forget whatever we have seen.
Let Your feastday make pass away the news we have heard.
- 52 Our mind has been distracted among the voices.
O Voice of His Father, quiet the [other] voices.
- 53 Let the inhabited earth be made very peaceful by You,
by Whom the sea was calmed from its tempests.¹⁴⁵
- 54 The demons rejoiced to hear the voice of blasphemy;
the Watchers will rejoice in us as they are accustomed.
- 55 From within Your flock [comes] the voice of distress;
in You, the One Who makes all joyful, let Your herd rejoice.
- 56 My Master, requite us not, for our murmuring;
our mouth is apt to complain since it is sinful.

142. Cf. Mark 11.12–14 et par.

143. Cf. Luke 19.1–10. Cf. HdF 25.13–15, for another example of Ephrem's linking Zacchaeus with the barren fig tree.

144. Cf. John 4.7–42.

145. Mark 4.36–41 et par.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 57 My Lord, on Your day, give all [kinds of] joys;
with blossoms of peace may we celebrate Your Pasch.
- 58 On the day of Your ascension may we be lifted up;
with the new bread may we be His remembrance.
- 59 Our Lord, increase peace for us that we may celebrate
the three feasts of the Deity.¹⁴⁶
- 60 My Lord, great is Your day; let it not be mocked.
Every one honors his birthday.
- 61 O, Just One, keep, honor Your birthday.
for Herod honored his birthday.¹⁴⁷
- 62 The unchaste dance pleased the tyrant.
May the chant¹⁴⁸ of chaste women please You, my Lord.
- 63 May the chant of the chaste women dispose You, my Lord,
to keep their bodies in chastity.¹⁴⁹
- 64 Herod's day resembles him.
Your day also resembles You.
- 65 The day of a turbid man is turbid with sin,
but serene like You is Your serene day.
- 66 The day of the tyrant killed the harbinger;¹⁵⁰
on Your feastday everyone proclaims glory.
- 67 On the day of the murderer the voice became silent,
but on Your day [there are] festive voices.
- 68 The unclean one on his feastday extinguished the light,¹⁵¹
so that darkness might hide the adulterers.
- 69 The time of the Holy One sets lights in array¹⁵²

146. Epiphany, Easter and Ascension, cf. str. 31, 32, 58.

147. Mark 6.21–29, et par.

148. *ql'* is "chant", "voice" or "sound."

149. *qdyšwt'* is used in its encratite sense here, but the chaste women of the previous lines are *nkpt'*.

150. John the Baptist.

151. Early Christian apologists defended their communities against the charge of "extinguishing the light," e.g., Min. Fel. Oct. 9.6–7. For other instances, cf. *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, trans. and annotated by G. W. Clarke, ACW 39 (New York, 1974), 224f., nn. 124f.

152. If Ephrem indicates a liturgical use of lights here, it is one of the earliest explicit literary attestations of this practice and of its symbolic significance, cf. F. Cabrol, "Cierges," DACL 3.2, 1613–22; H. Leclercq, "Lampes," DACL 8.1, 1086–1221; H. Thurston, "Lights," CE 9.244b–247a; D. R. Dendy, *The Use of Lights in Christian Worship*, Alcuin Club Collection 41 (London, 1959). Since the practice of lighting candles or lamps was primarily associated with death in pre-Christian contexts, it is not surprising that it is first attested at the Easter Vigil and in devotions at martyrs' tombs. Jerome (c. *Vigilantium vii*) and the *Testamentum Domini* I.19, attest to a liturgical

HYMN 4

- to make the darkness flee with its hidden things.
- 70 The day of this fox¹⁵³ stank as he did;
but holy is the feastday of the True Lamb.
- 71 The day of the transitory one passed away as he did,
but Your day, like You, will remain forever.
- 72 The day of the tyrant raged as he did,
for by force he silenced a just voice.
- 73 The feast of the Humble One is gentle as He is,
Whose sun shone forth on His false accusers.¹⁵⁴
- 74 The tyrant knew that he was not the king of kings
so he yielded to the King of kings.
- 75 My Lord, the entire day is insufficient for me
to set off praise of You against censure of him.
- 76 May Your day full of compassion excuse my offense
that against the unclean day I have set off Your day.
- 77 For Your day is beyond comparison,
and it cannot be compared with our days.
- 78 The day of a human is like an earthly [being].
But the day of God is like God.
- 79 My Lord, Your day is greater than the prophets' [days].
Yet I undertook to compare it with that of a murderer.
- 80 You understand, my Lord, as the All-knowing,
You Who hear the comparisons that my tongue makes.
- 81 On Your day grant to me a request for life,
as on his day he granted a request for death.
- 82 The needy king swore on his feastday
that half of his kingdom would be the price of the dance.
- 83 But on Your feastday, our All-enriching One,

lighting with symbolic intent in the East, the latter almost certainly in a Syriac environment, cf. F. X. Funk, *Das Testament unseres Herrn und die verwandten Schriften* (Mainz, 1901), esp. 82–87. Further, cf. I. Dalmais, “Le thème de la lumière dans l’office du matin des églises syriennes orientales, in *Noël, Épiphanie, retour du Christ* (= *Lex orandi* 40; Paris, 1967), 257–76.

153. Herod Antipas, youngest son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea during the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus. In his encounter with Herod, Jesus referred to the ruler as a “fox,” cf. Luke 13.31–33. The fox figures in the Bible and in classical literature, especially Aesop’s fables, as the crafty but base opponent of the lion; cf. Harold W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (Cambridge, England, 1972), 214–24, and Appendix XI, “The Meaning of ‘Fox,’ ” 343–47.

154. Cf. Mark 14.55–65 et par. To accuse falsely, *ῥέω*, is the same word used frequently in Nat. 5–18, where I have more often translated it as “slander.”

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- let us cast away, as is right, the crumb of bread.¹⁵⁵
- 84 From the thirsty earth gushes forth a Spring
sufficiently to satisfy the thirst of the peoples.
- 85 From a virgin womb as if from a rock,
sprouted the Seed from which harvests have come.
- 86 Joseph filled innumerable storehouses,
but they were emptied out and consumed in the years of the
famine.¹⁵⁶
- 87 The one True Ear [of wheat] gave bread,
heavenly bread without limit.
- 88 The bread that the first-born broke in the desert¹⁵⁷
was consumed and passed away, although He multiplied it greatly.
- 89 Once again He has broken new bread
that ages and generations will not consume.
- 90 They consumed the seven loaves of bread that He broke,¹⁵⁸
and they finished also the five loaves of bread that He multiplied.¹⁵⁹
- 91 The one loaf of bread that He broke conquered the creation;
for however much it is divided it multiplies all the more.¹⁶⁰
- 92 Again, a great deal of wine filled the water jugs;¹⁶¹
it was poured out and consumed although there had been a great
deal.

155. Does Ephrem mean to give bread to the poor? If so, the verb *šā'* is an odd choice, but cf. Nat. 1.84, 93–95, for similar notions. A second possibility is a reference to Mark 7.24–30 et par. The third, and greatest, possibility is that the “crumb of bread” represents the Old Testament types for the Eucharist, now superseded by the sacrament itself. Strophes 84–108 are clearly eucharistic, stressing the unlimited nourishment available in Christ over against the limitations of its types. Beck attributes Ephrem’s understanding of the limitless character of the sacraments to the emphasis on the presence of the Holy Spirit, cf. Beck, *Eucharistic*, esp. 51–58. It is certain that the presence of the Spirit plays an outstanding role in Ephrem’s sacramental theology; further, cf. Graffin, *Eucharistic*. It is probably unwarranted to assume, however, that every reference to the spirit or to a spiritual presence should be taken as a reference to the Holy Spirit rather than to the divinity in a more general sense, cf. the remarks of J. P. de Jong, in “La connexion entre le rite de la Consignation et l’Epiclèse dans saint Éphrem,” *SP* 2 (1957), (=TU 64), 29–34, esp. 31f. In the present passage the emphasis on the power of Christ, esp. str. 155–213, refers not to the Holy Spirit but is instead best interpreted in the light of Logos theology; pace Beck, *Eucharistic*, 58.

156. Cf. Gen. 41.49.

157. The manna of the Israelites, Exod. 16.

158. Cf. Mark 8.1–10 et par.

159. Cf. Mark 6.32–44 et par.

160. Cf. Mark 14.22–25 et par. The Eucharist, unlike its types, is inexhaustible.

161. Cf. John 2.6ff.

HYMN 4

- 93 Although small was the drink of the cup that He gave,¹⁶²
 very great was its power—infinite.
- 94 In the cup that accepts all wines,
 the mystery¹⁶³ remains the same.
- 95 The one loaf of bread He broke cannot be confined,
 and the one cup that He mingled cannot be limited.
- 96 The grain of wheat that was sown, after three days
 came up and filled the storehouse of life.
- 97 The bread is spiritual like its Giver;
 it revives spiritual ones in a spiritual manner.
- 98 But the one who takes it in a bodily manner
 takes it indiscreetly and uselessly.¹⁶⁴
- 99 Let the mind take the bread of the Compassionate One
 in a discerning manner as the medicine of life.
- 100 If sacrifices of the dead in the name of demons
 in a mystery are sacrificed and eaten,
- 101 how much more fitting it is for us to perform nobly
 the mystery of the consecration of the gift.
- 102 Whoever eats from the sacrifice in the name of demons¹⁶⁵
 will become demonic without dispute.
- 103 Whoever eats of the bread of the Heavenly One
 will become heavenly without doubt.
- 104 Wine teaches us, since it makes one who
 is allied with it [become] one like itself.
- 105 For it hates especially the one who loves it;
 it intoxicates and maddens him and mocks him.¹⁶⁶
- 106 Light teaches us since it makes the eye
 a source of brightness like itself.¹⁶⁷
- 107 The eye by light saw nakedness,
 and modesty hastened to the modest man.

162. Cf. Mark 14.22–25 et par.

163. *rʿzʾ*, usually rendered “symbol” is translated here and in str. 100f. as “mystery.” For the sacramental use of the term, cf. Beck, *Symbolum-Mysterium*, 39f.

164. 1 Cor. 11.29.

165. 1 Cor. 8 and 10.

166. Cf. Lewy, *Sobria ebrietas*.

167. The light comes from the eye to meet the light outside. As Beck has noted, this idea occurs several times in Ephrem’s corpus and is of Platonic origin, cf. Beck HdF 73.16, n. 2; further, Dillon, *Platonists*, 275.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 108 Wine made that nakedness
that does not know [how] to spare the modest ones.
- 109 The First-born put on the weapons of the Deceitful One
so that with the weapons that killed He might, conversely, give life.
- 110 By the wood¹⁶⁸ with which he killed us, we were delivered;
by the wine¹⁶⁹ that maddened us, we became modest.
- 111 By the rib¹⁷⁰ plucked out from Adam,
the Evil One plucked out the heart of Adam.
- 112 There shone forth from the rib¹⁷¹ the hidden Power
Who cut down Satan as [He did] Dagon,¹⁷²
- 113 for in that Ark was hidden scripture
that cried out and proclaimed the Conqueror.
- 114 But there was also in this a revealed symbol,
for Dagon was overcome in his place of refuge.
- 115 It came to fulfillment following the symbol
that the Evil One was vanquished in his own retreat.¹⁷³
- 116 Blessed is He Who came and in Whom were fulfilled
the symbols of the left hand and of the right hand.¹⁷⁴
- 117 He completed the symbol that was in the lamb
and He completed that type that was in Dagon.
- 118 Blessed is He Who redeemed us by the True Lamb
and destroyed our Destroyer as [He destroyed] Dagon.
- 119 In January when the nights are long,
daytime without limit shone forth to us.
- 120 In winter when the whole creation is gloomy
the beauty that gladdened all of creation emerged.
- 121 In winter that made the earth barren,
virginity learned to give birth.
- 122 In January that stilled the birthpangs of the earth,

168. Ephrem frequently uses *qys'* to refer to the forbidden tree of paradise and to the cross of Christ.

169. The eucharistic wine is brought into the theme of sober inebriation.

170. Eve.

171. Mary, the second Eve.

172. 1 Sam. 5. The incident is portrayed in Panel WB4 of the synagogue at Dura Europos, cf. C. H. Kraeling, with C. C. Torrey, C. B. Welles and B. Geiger, *The Synagogue, Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report*, 8.1 (New Haven, 1956), 101–103 and Pl. LVI.

173. As Dagon was destroyed in his own sanctuary, so Satan is destroyed in his place of refuge, woman!

174. I.e., both evil and good types in the Old Testament are fulfilled in the New.

HYMN 4

- the birthpangs of virginity came.
- 123 No one sees the young lamb
at first except the shepherds.
- 124 At the moment of his birth the good tidings
of the True Lamb also rushed to the shepherds.¹⁷⁵
- 125 Perhaps even there the marvel doubled,
for the Lamb [born] out of season spoke and emerged.
- 126 For the lamb not [born] in season becomes the harbinger
for the Lamb Whose conception was not [merely] natural.¹⁷⁶
- 127 The Old Wolf saw the nursling Lamb,
and he was alarmed by Him Who had been transformed.
- 128 For since the Wolf had put on sheep's clothing,¹⁷⁷
the Shepherd of all became a lamb in the flock,
- 129 so that when the Greedy One dared attack the Lowly One,
the Powerful One would tear apart that Devourer.
- 130 The Holy One dwelt in the womb in a bodily manner,
and behold, He dwells in the mind in a spiritual manner.
- 131 Mary who conceived Him hated sexual union;
the soul in which He dwells will not commit adultery.
- 132 When Mary perceived Him, she forsook her bridegroom;
behold, He dwells in chaste women if they have perceived Him.
- 133 A deaf person cannot perceive a great thunderclap,
nor an insolent person the voice of a commandment.
- 134 Therefore a deaf person is tranquil at the moment of thunder,
and an insolent one is tranquil at the voice of warning.
- 135 If the powerful thunderclap terrified the mute one,
if the powerful reproach weighed upon the corrupt,
- 136 the deaf one who cannot hear is not to blame,
but the one who stops up his ears—this is impudence.
- 137 From time to time, then, there was a thunderclap;
the voice of the Law thundered daily.
- 138 Let us not shut up our ears—openings that are open
and cannot be closed—so that they may not accuse us.

175. Luke 2.8ff.

176. While Jesus is the True Lamb, whose conception is not natural, John the Baptist is the lamb born out of season, since his parents were old. As the lamb bleats and emerges at birth, John the Baptist, went out to preach.

177. Matt. 7.15. The Wolf is Satan.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 139 The gate of hearing is open by nature,
so that by its force it might rebuke our insolence.
- 140 The will is able to open and close
the gates of the pupils of the eyes and the gate of the mouth.
- 141 He granted to us to see . . .
To hear news . . . to be closed.
- 142 . . .
. . . its minutiae by our will.
- 143 Glory to that Voice that became a body,
and to the lofty Word that became flesh.
- 144 Ears even heard Him, eyes saw Him,
hands even touched Him, the mouth ate Him.
- 145 Limbs and senses gave thanks to
the One Who came and revived all that is corporeal.
- 146 Mary bore a mute Babe
though in Him were hidden all our tongues.¹⁷⁸
- 147 Joseph carried Him, yet hidden in Him was
a silent nature older than everything.
- 148 The Lofty One became like a little child, yet hidden in Him was
a treasure of Wisdom that suffices for all.
- 149 He was lofty but he sucked Mary's milk,
and from His blessings all creation sucks.
- 150 He is the Living Breast of living breath;
by His life the dead were suckled, and they revived.
- 151 Without the breath of air no one can live;
without the power of the Son no one can rise.
- 152 Upon the living breath of the One Who vivifies all
depend the living beings above and below.¹⁷⁹
- 153 As indeed He sucked Mary's milk,
He has given suck—life to the universe.
- 154 As again He dwelt in His mother's womb,
in His womb dwells all creation.
- 155 Mute He was as a babe, yet He gave
to all creation all His commands.

178. The theme of apparent powerlessness but real power continues through str. 213; for ■ similar idea, cf. Ath. de inc. 17.

179. Str. 151f. continue the eucharistic theme, cf. Graffin, *Eucharistie*, 107; Beck, *Eucharistie*, 58.

HYMN 4

- 156 For without the First-born no one is able
to approach Being, for He alone is capable of it.
- 157 Indeed the thirty years that He was on earth,
who was guiding all creation?
- 158 Who was receiving all offerings?
the praise of those on high and of those below?
- 159 He was entirely in the depths and entirely in the heights;
He was entirely in all and entirely in each one.
- 160 While His body in the womb was being formed,
His power was constructing all the members.
- 161 While the fetus of the Son was being formed in the womb,
He Himself was forming babes in the womb.
- 162 Ineffectual as was His body in the womb,
His power in the womb was not correspondingly ineffectual.
- 163 Nor again is it [true] that as weak as this body was on the cross,
so weak would be His power on the cross.
- 164 For when upon the cross He revived the dead,
did His body revive them or His will?
- 165 Thus although all of Him was dwelling in the womb,
His hidden will was supervising all.
- 166 For He saw that all of Him was hanging on the cross
but His power made all creation tremble.
- 167 For [His power] darkened the sun and shook the earth;
graves were torn open, and the dead emerged.¹⁸⁰
- 168 See, indeed, that He was entirely on the cross,
while yet He remained entirely everywhere.
- 169 In the same way He had been entirely in the womb,
while yet He remained entirely everywhere.
- 170 While indeed He was on the cross, He revived the dead;
just so, while He was a babe, He was forming babes.
- 171 While He was dead, He was opening graves;
while He was in the womb, He was opening wombs.
- 172 Come and hear, my friends, about the hidden Son
Who was revealed in His body, yet hidden was His power.
- 173 For the power of the Son is a fluid power;
the womb did not confine it as [it did] the body.

180. Matt. 27.51-53.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 174 For while the power dwelt in the womb,
it was forming babes in the womb.
- 175 His power embraced the one who embraced Him,
for if His power were curtailed all would collapse.
- 176 Indeed the power that contained all creation,
while He was in the womb, did not desert all.
- 177 He formed His individuality,¹⁸¹ the Image, in the womb,
and He formed in all wombs all persons.
- 178 Although He grew up among the poor,
from the storehouse of plenty He provided for all.
- 179 While again she who anointed Him, was anointing Him,¹⁸²
with His dew and His rain He anointed the universe.
- 180 The Magi offered myrrh and gold,
although hidden in Him was a treasure of wealth.
- 181 The Magi offered to Him from what was His:
myrrh and frankincense that He had brought into existence and
created.¹⁸³
- 182 By power from Him Mary's womb became able
to bear the One who bears all.
- 183 From the great treasury of all creation
Mary gave to Him everything that she gave.
- 184 She gave Him milk from what He made exist.
She gave Him food from what He had created.
- 185 He gave milk to Mary as God.
In turn, He was given suck by her as human.
- 186 Her arms carried Him, for He lightened His weight,
and her bosom embraced Him, for He made Himself small.
- 187 Who would be able to measure his grandeur?
He diminished his measurements corresponding to the garment.¹⁸⁴
- 188 She wove it and clothed in it Him Who had taken off His glory;
she measured and wove for Him Who had made Himself small.
- 189 The sea bore Him; it became calm and abated,¹⁸⁵
and how indeed did the arms of Joseph bear Him?

181. Syriac *qnwm'* is the equivalent of Greek ὑπόστασις.

182. Mark 14.3–9 et par.

183. Matt. 2.11.

184. On Christ's body as a garment, cf. Brock, *Clothing*, esp. 15ff.

185. Mark 6.45–52 et par.

HYMN 4

- 190 The Womb of Sheol conceived Him and burst open;¹⁸⁶
and how did the womb of Mary sustain Him?
- 191 With His voice He split stones upon graves;¹⁸⁷
and how did Mary's bosom sustain Him?
- 192 You came to humiliation to save all:
glory to You from all who were saved by You.
- 193 Who is able to speak about the hidden Son
Who came down and put on a body in the womb?
- 194 He came out and like a babe He sucked milk,
and the Son of the Ruler of All crawled among infants.
- 195 Openly the youths in the marketplace surrounded Him;
secretly the Watchers surrounded Him in awe.
- 197 He was cheerful among the infants as a baby;
awesome was He among the Watchers as a commander.
- 198 Too awesome was He for John to loosen His sandals;¹⁸⁸
accessible was He for sinners who kissed His feet.¹⁸⁹
- 199 The Watchers as Watchers saw Him;
according to the degree of his knowledge each person saw Him.¹⁹⁰
- 200 Everyone according to the measure of his discernment
thus perceived Him, that One greater than all.
- 201 In His Father alone is the measure
the fulness of knowledge of Him, for He knows how much He is.¹⁹¹
- 202 But each according to measure acquires knowledge of Him:
heavenly natures and earthly.
- 203 He Who is Lord of all, gives us all,
and He Who is Enricher of all, borrows from all.
- 204 He is Giver of all as one without needs.
Yet He borrows back again as one deprived.
- 205 He gave cattle and sheep as Creator,
but, on the other hand, He sought sacrifices as one deprived.¹⁹²

186. Cf. Teixidor, *Descente*, and *idem*, *Muerte*.

187. Matt. 27.52.

188. Mark 1.7–8 et par.

189. Luke 7.38.

190. The notion of ἐπιβολαί of Middle and Neo-Platonism underlies Ephrem's understanding here. For a very similar use in Origen, cf. F. Bertrand, *La mystique de Jésus chez Origène*, *Théologie* 23 (Paris, 1951).

191. John 10.15.

192. E.g., Lev. 1.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 206 He made water into wine as Maker,
but, on the other hand, He drank some of it as a poor man.
- 207 From His own He mixed it at the wedding feast—
His [own] wine He mixed and gave [it] to drink where He was
invited.¹⁹³
- 208 By his love the old man Simeon became great,
so that a mortal offered the One who saved all.
- 209 It was by the power from Him that Simeon carried Him;
he who offered Him was offered by Him.¹⁹⁴
- 210 He gave the laying-on of hands to Moses on the mountain,¹⁹⁵
and He received it in the midst of the river from John.¹⁹⁶
- 211 By the power of His gift, John was competent,
and the earthly one baptized the Heavenly One.
- 212 By the power that came from Him, the earth bore Him;
it was beginning to collapse, but His power bound it together.
- 213 From what is His, Martha gave Him food to eat;¹⁹⁷
she placed before Him the foods created by Him.
- 214 All who gave have vowed from what is His;
from His treasury they have placed [gifts] on His table.

193. John 2.

194. Luke 2.22–32.

195. Cf. Lev. 8.

196. Cf. Mark 1. 9–11 et par.

197. Luke 10. 38–42.

5

This hymn is the first from Ephrem's original collection of Nativity Hymns, which forms the core of the full collection of the manuscript tradition. All thirteen hymns in this original group have the same strophic pattern and are to be sung to the same melody. Further, most contain strophes attributed to the *dramatis personae* of the nativity story, especially Mary. They also share the same subject matter: the paradox of the incarnation and the defense of the virgin birth.

This hymn begins with a celebration of the joys and triumphs of the month of Conun (December–January), in which the incarnation of the Lord of the universe made possible the exaltation and divinization of humankind. After twice enumerating three classes of people—slave, free and royal—in ascending order of dignity, Ephrem strikingly contrasts the exaltation of humans with the *kenosis* of Christ (str. 1–4). The humble righteousness of Christ conquers the rebellious disobedience of Adam (str. 5). After a brief exhortation to chase away boredom (str. 6), Ephrem sets out a series of images for the feast of the Nativity: it is a treasure-house full of spiritual riches (str. 7–9); the garlanding of doorways (str. 1) represents the garlanding of the believer's heart to welcome the Holy Spirit (str. 10); in contrast to earthly kings who collect taxes, God has paid our debt and promised even more (str. 12); the conquering sun of the winter equinox is an appropriate symbol for the victory of Christ the Light (str. 12–15).

The final third of the hymn is a meditation on the paradox of the incarnation put into the mouths of Joseph (str. 16–18) and Mary (str. 19–24). Joseph first ponders his initial misunderstanding of the virgin birth. Then he turns to the implications of his humble trade, on the one hand, and his Davidic descent, on the other. Mary meditates on the incarnation in more theological and philosophical terms: How can she be the mother of an infant who is the Director of all creation and Commander of the universe?

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

5

To the melody "Who is able to speak?"

- 1 This is the month that bears utterly
all joys: for slaves—liberation,
for the free—pride, for doors—garlanding,
for bodies—dainties. And purple [garments]
it showers in its love as if for a king.

Refrain: Praise to You, fair Child of the Virgin!

- 2 This is the month that bears entirely
all victories: it frees the spirit;
it subdues the body; it brings forth life
among mortals. Divinity
it showers in its love upon humanity.
- 3 In this month slaves recline
upon rugs, and the free recline
upon carpets, and kings recline
upon tapestries. In a manger
the Lord of the universe reclined for the sake of the universe.
- 4 Behold, O Bethlehem, David the king
clothes himself in fine white linen. The Lord of David
and Son of David hid His glory
in swaddling clothes. His swaddling clothes gave
a robe of glory to human beings.¹⁹⁸
- 5 On this day our Lord exchanged
radiance for shame, as the Humble One.
For Adam exchanged truth for evil
as a rebel. The Gracious One took pity;
His upright [deeds] conquered those of the perverse.
- 6 Let everyone chase away his boredom
because it was not boring for that Majesty
to be in the womb nine months
for our sake and to be thirty
years in Sodom among madmen.

198. The garment of glory, originally bestowed on Adam and Eve but lost through sin, is restored by Christ; cf. Nat. 17.4 and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 216, 223.

HYMN 5

- 7 Because the Gracious One saw that the human race
was poor and humble, He made feastdays
as treasure-houses, and He opened them
for the lazy, so that the feast would stir up
the lazy one to rise up and become rich.
- 8 Behold, the First-born has opened His feastday for us
like a treasure-house. This one day,
the [most] perfect in the year, alone opens
this treasure-house. Come, let us prosper
and become rich from it before it is closed.
- 9 Blessed are the vigilant who plunder from it
the spoils of life. It is a great disgrace
if one sees his neighbor
carrying away treasures, yet he in the treasure-house
reposes and sleeps to come out empty-handed.
- 10 On this feast let everyone garland
the door of his heart. May the Holy Spirit
desire to enter in its door to dwell
and sanctify. For behold, She moves about
to all the doors [to see] where She may dwell.
- 11 On this feast the openings in the curtains
are joyous, and the Holy One rejoices¹⁹⁹
in the holy Temple, and a voice thunders
in the mouth of babes, and the Messiah rejoices
in His feast as Commander of the host.
- 12 On the birth of the Son, the king²⁰⁰ was enrolling
the people in the census,
so that they would be indebted to him. To us the King came out
to cancel our debts, and He wrote in His name
another debt, so that He would be indebted to us.
- 13 The sun conquered and engraved a symbol
on the degrees that it ascended. Since it ascended
it is twelve days, and today this is
the thirteenth:²⁰¹ a perfect symbol

199. Or, as Beck suggests, "the holy [altar] rejoices."

200. Caesar Augustus, cf. Luke 2.1.

201. January 6, the thirteenth day since December 25, the day of the Conquering Sun.
Further on this theme, cf. Nat. 27.16–22, esp. 27.21.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- of the birth of the Son and of His Twelve.
- 14 Moses shut in the lamb in April
on the tenth day²⁰²—a symbol of the Son
Who came into the womb and closed Himself up
on the tenth day. He came out from the womb
in this month when the light conquers.
- 15 Darkness is defeated to signify
that Satan is defeated, and light conquers
to shout out that the First-born is victorious.
The Dark One is defeated with the darkness,
and our Light conquers with the sun.
- 16 Joseph caressed the Son
as a babe. He served Him
as God. He rejoiced in Him
as in a blessing, and he was attentive to Him
as to the Just One—a great paradox!
- 17 “Who has given me the Son of the Most High
to be a son to me? I was jealous of Your mother
and wanted to divorce her.²⁰³ I did not know
that in her womb was a great treasure
that would suddenly enrich my poverty.
- 18 “David the king arose from my race
and put on a crown.²⁰⁴ Great ignominy
have I attained, for instead of a king
I am a carpenter.²⁰⁵ A crown has found me
for in my bosom is the Lord of crowns.”
- 19 With rival tones Mary was aglow.
She, too, sang: “Who has granted
to the barren one to conceive and give birth
to the One [Who is also] many, to the small [Who is also] great,
Who is fully present in me yet fully present in the universe.²⁰⁶
- 20 “The day when Gabriel entered

202. On the tenth of Nisan (April–May), in preparation for its slaughter four days later for Passover, cf. Ex. 12.3–6.

203. Matt. 1.19.

204. Matt. 1.1–16, 20.

205. Matt. 13.55; cf. Mark 6.3, Luke 6.23.

206. Cf. Nat. 4.11.

HYMN 5

my poor presence,²⁰⁷ he made me immediately
a free woman and a servant; for I am servant
of Your divinity, but I am also mother
of Your humanity, [my] Lord and [my] son.²⁰⁸

- 21 “Suddenly a handmaiden has become daughter of the King
by You, Son of the King. Behold, the lowly one [is]
in the House of David because of You!
O Son of David, behold, the daughter of the earth
has reached heaven by the Heavenly One.
- 22 “Indeed, how much I am amazed that an aged Babe
is set before me—One Who lifts His gaze
entirely to heaven without ceasing.
The murmuring of His mouth—how it seems to me
as if His silence were speaking with God!
- 23 “Indeed, who has seen a Babe who gazes
entirely everywhere? He gazes
as the Director of all creation
above and below. He looks as
the Commander of the universe.
- 24 “How shall I open the fount of milk
for You, the Fount? How shall I give
sustenance to You, the All-sustaining,
from Your [own] table? How shall I approach
with swaddling clothes the One arrayed in streams [of light]?”

207. Luke 1.26.

208. Although Ephrem's specification that Mary is servant of the divinity and mother of the humanity of Christ has a strongly Nestorian ring, it would be anachronistic to judge his orthodoxy by the standards of the fifth century. In fact, his statement is not even Nestorian, since Nestorius used the term *χριστότοκος*, “Christ-bearer,” not simply *ἀνθρωπότοκος*, “human-bearer,” for Mary. Further, in the next strophe, she refers to herself as “the daughter of the earth [who] has reached heaven by the Heavenly One.” Ephrem's concern is with the paradox of the incarnation, not with the precise delineation of the two “natures” of Christ. (But cf. Nat. 6.7–11).

6

This second hymn of the core collection develops the theme of the manifestation of Christ to the world. Most of the New Testament materials on which Ephrem's meditation is based are drawn from the infancy narratives of the gospels of Matthew and Luke. The hymn begins with several strophes (str. 1–6) sung by Mary, who ponders the proper way to address her son. Affirming the virgin birth, still Mary says it is appropriate to call him son of Joseph. Yet he is also Son of God, Son of man, Son of David. Mary complains that she is slandered and persecuted, but she can seek refuge in Christ and his life-giving power.

Turning now to the infancy narratives, Ephrem finds a series of persons who recognize Jesus' true identity. First, thanks to the star of Bethlehem, the Magi found the Divine Infant and worshipped him (str. 7–8). The two harbingers of Christ, the star of Bethlehem and John the Baptist, announce the divinity and humanity of Christ, respectively, correcting adoptionist and docetic tendencies (str. 9–11). Now, turning from the Matthean account to the Lucan, Ephrem recounts the recognition of the prophets, Simeon and Anna (str. 12–14), followed by the recognition of "the barren" Elizabeth, Zachariah and their son, John (str. 15–18). Even Herod, Ephrem claims, returning to Matthew's account, recognized the Lion of Judah enough to try to kill him (str. 19–20). All of creation announced his coming (str. 21). Finally, at the baptism of Jesus, the Father himself proclaimed his Son; the Watchers (angels) and children joined in with their hosannas (str. 22). At last all this jubilation awakens even Sion (str. 23)—Ephrem has shifted to the entry into Jerusalem. Sion, startled but not truly awakened, kills the Awakener. When Christ rises from the dead, he awakens the Gentiles instead of the Jewish people (Sion).

HYMN 6

6

The same melody

- 1 “My mouth knows not how to address You,
O Son of the Living One. I tremble
to dare to address You as son of Joseph,
for You are not his seed. Yet I shrink
from denying the name of him to whom I have been betrothed.

Refrain: Praise to You, Son of the Most High, Who put on our body.

- 2 “Although You are the Son of the One, I shall call You henceforth
Son of many, for myriads of names
do not suffice for You, for You are Son of God
and Son of Man and Son of Joseph
and Son of David and Lord of Mary.
- 3 “Who made the speechless one
Lord of speech? With your pure conception
evil men have slandered me.²⁰⁹ O Holy One,
be Your mother’s defender. Show miracles
to convince them whence is Your conception.
- 4 “For Your sake, behold, I am hated,
Lover of all. Behold, I am persecuted
because I conceived and bore the One Place of Refuge
for human beings. Let Adam rejoice
for You are his Key to paradise.
- 5 “Behold, the sea is stirred up against Your mother
as against Jonah. Behold, Herod,
the raging surf, seeks to drown
the Lord of the seas. Where shall I flee?
Teach me, Lord of His mother.
- 6 “With You I shall flee to acquire by You
life in every place. With You, the pit
would not be the pit, for with You one would

209. Jewish criticism of the virgin birth is an issue that constantly recurs in these hymns, cf. McVey, Tol’dot.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

ascend to heaven. With You, the grave
would not be the grave, for You are also the resurrection.”²¹⁰

7 The star of light²¹¹ that shone forth suddenly
beyond its nature is smaller than the sun
yet greater than the sun; it was smaller
in visible light; it was greater
in hidden power because of its symbol.

8 The morning star shed its rays
among the dark ones and led them
like blind men. They came and received
a great light. They gave offerings
and received life and worshipped and returned.²¹²

9 Above and below there were two harbingers
for the Son: the star of light
shouted out joyfully from above, and John
proclaimed from below. Two harbingers:
both an earthly one and a heavenly one.²¹³

10 That heavenly one showed his nature
that is from [God’s] Majesty. And the earthly one also
showed His nature that is from humanity.
O great wonder!—that His divinity
and His humanity were announced by them.²¹⁴

11 Whoever considered Him earthly—
the star of light would convince him
that He was heavenly. And whoever considered Him
spiritual—John
would convince him that He was also bodily.

12 Into the holy Temple Simeon carried Him
and sang a lullabye to Him, “You have come, Compassionate One,
having pity on my old age, making my bones enter
into Sheol in peace. By You I will be raised
out of the grave into paradise.”

210. John 11.25.

211. Matt. 2.2–12, the star of Bethlehem. Ephrem begins an enumeration of witnesses to the dignity of Christ. Cf. Virg 15.

212. Matt. 2.11f.

213. Cf. Nat. 24.23.

214. The star announces the divine nature of Christ; John the Baptist announces his human nature.

HYMN 6

- 13 Anna²¹⁵ embraced Him; she placed her mouth
upon His lips, and [then] the Spirit rested
upon her lips, like Isaiah
whose mouth was silent [until] a coal drew near
to his lips and opened his mouth.²¹⁶
- 14 Anna was aglow with the spirit of His mouth.
She sang him a lullabye, "Royal Son,
despised son, being silent, You hear;
hidden, You see; concealed, You know;
God-man, glory to Your name."
- 15 Even the barren heard and came running
with their provisions. The Magi are coming
with their treasures. The barren are coming
with their provisions. Provisions and treasures
were heaped up suddenly among the poor.
- 16 The barren woman²¹⁷ cried out as she was accustomed,
"Who has granted to me, blessed woman,
to see your Babe by whom heaven and earth
are filled? Blessed is Your Fruit
that brought forth the cluster on a barren vine."²¹⁸
- 17 Zachariah came and his mouth was opened.²¹⁹
A noble one, he cries out, "Where is the King
on Whose account I have begotten the voice
to proclaim before Him? Hail, Son of the King!
Even our priesthood will be handed over to You."
- 18 John approached with his parents
and bowed down to the Son, and brightness rested
on his face.²²⁰ He did not leap
as in the womb. A great wonder
that here he bows down and there he leaps [for joy].
- 19 Even Herod, the despicable fox,²²¹

215. Cf. Luke 2.36–38, where Anna prophesies as Isaiah, but she neither embraces nor kisses the infant.

216. Isa. 6.6f.

217. Elizabeth.

218. Christ, Mary's fruit, made it possible for the barren Elizabeth to bear John.

219. Luke 1.64.

220. Cf. HdF 7.3 on the baptism of Jesus.

221. Luke 13.31–33. On Herod as a fox, cf. Nat. 4.70.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

who swaggered as if [he were] a lion—
the fox lay down and howled when he heard
the roar of the Lion Who came to lie down
upon his kingdom, as it is written.²²²

- 20 But the fox heard that the Lion was a cub
and was like a suckling, and he sharpened his teeth
so that while He was still a newborn, the fox might lie in wait
to strangle the Lion before He had grown strong
and the breadth of his mouth should destroy him.²²³
- 21 All of creation became mouths
and cried out above Him: the Magi cried out
with their offerings; the barren cried out
with their offspring; the star of light
cried out in the air, "Behold the King's Son!"
- 22 The sky was opened; the water sparkled;
the Dove hovered over; the voice of the Father,
more weighty than thunder, said,
"This is My Beloved"²²⁴; the Watchers proclaimed Him,
the children shouted joyfully with their hosannas.
- 23 By these voices that proclaimed and cried out
above and below, the sleep of Sion
was not frightened away. By His colt she was startled;²²⁵
he trampled and grieved her; she started and rose up.
She killed the Watcher because He awakened her.²²⁶
- 24 The Watcher rose up from within the grave,
for He was sleeping while awake, and He came and found
the peoples asleep. He shouted for joy and cried out
and awakened them. The sleeping [people] thanked
the Watcher who made [them] watchers on earth.

222. Gen. 49.8–12.

223. Herod Antipas, the fox of Luke 13, son of Herod the Great, is here confused with his father, cf. Matt. 2.16–18. Jesus, the Davidic Messiah, is the Lion of Judah.

224. Mark 1.11.

225. Ephrem has shifted to the entry into Jerusalem, Mark 11.1f.

226. Sion, the female personification of the Jews, is seen by Ephrem as the killer of Christ, here understood in the language of angel-Christology as the "Watcher." On the watchers, cf. Nat. 1.61, 4.195, CJ 1.8.

This hymn begins with the infancy narrative of Luke in which the angelic praise at the nativity is followed by the homage of the shepherds to Jesus. Ephrem uses the theme of shepherds and sheep to draw out several Old Testament types for Christ: the Paschal Lamb, Moses as shepherd of the people in the wilderness, and David. Noah is also included, apparently because his name brings to Ephrem's mind Orphic themes. At the ninth strophe Ephrem universalizes the praise by adding women of various ages and states in life as well as old men. The unity of the hymn is somewhat artificially maintained by alluding again to the infancy narrative, this time from the Matthean version, the slaughter of the innocents.

The same melody

- 1 At the birth of the Son a great clamor
took place in Bethlehem, for Watchers descended
to give praise there;²²⁷ a great thunder
were their voices. With this voice of praise
the silent ones²²⁸ came to give praise to the Son.

Refrain: Blessed is the Babe by whom Adam and Eve grew young again.

- 2 Shepherds, too, came carrying
the good things of the flock: sweet milk,
fresh meat, fitting praise.
They divided [the gifts] and gave to Joseph the meat,
to Mary the milk, to the Son the praise.

227. Luke 2.13.

228. Beck suggests dumb animals, cf. Ps. Matt. 14, HdF 13.10.3. More usually *štyq'* refers to inanimate objects or to people, while *l' mlyl'* refers to animals. Yet the content of the following strophes lends support to Beck's view.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 3 They carried and offered to Him: suckling lamb
to the Paschal Lamb, the first-born to the First-born,
a sacrifice to the Sacrifice, a temporal lamb
to the True Lamb. A fitting sight
that a lamb to the Lamb should be offered.
- 4 The lamb bleated while being offered
to the First-born. He thanked the Lamb
that came to free sheep and oxen
from sacrifices, even the traditional
paschal lamb that served as a symbol of the Son.²²⁹
- 5 The shepherds approached to worship Him.
With their staffs they greeted Him,
prophesying, "Peace, O Greatest
of shepherds! The staff of Moses
acknowledges Your staff, Shepherd of the universe."
- 6 For You [are the One] Moses acknowledged—he whose
lambs became wolves and whose sheep became
like dragons and his ewes [like]
savage beasts. In the fearful wasteland
his flock became rabid and attacked him.²³⁰
- 7 You, then, the shepherds will acknowledge,
for You reconciled wolves and lambs
in the flock. You are the newborn
Who is older than Noah and younger than Noah,
Who pacified all in the ark.²³¹
- 8 For the sake of a lamb, David, Your father
killed a lion.²³² O Son of David,
You have killed the hidden wolf

229. Literally, "... the paschal Lamb that was handed down and served as a symbol of the Son." The traditional sacrificial animals are grateful that there is to be no more animal sacrifice after Christ, not even a Passover celebration. Cf. Nat. 18.18–19.

230. Tensions between Moses and the people of Israel in the desert become a basis for Ephrem's portrayal of the Jews as perennially faithless in relation to God and to the leaders chosen by God. On the portrayal of Moses in Syriac Christian literature, cf. R. M. Tonneau, "Moïse dans la tradition syrienne," in *Moïse l'homme de l'Alliance* (Paris, 1955), 245–65.

231. Ephrem plays on *kwl'* in two different vocalizations: *kûlâ* meaning "all, the universe" and *kewelâ* meaning "ark." Elsewhere he plays on *nwh* meaning "to rest" as well as "Noah." This pun, the Orphic theme of rest, and the more usual Jewish and Christian association of David with Orpheus perhaps explain Ephrem's mention of Noah here just before David and in the context of shepherd imagery.

232. 1 Sam. 17.34–37.

HYMN 7

- that killed Adam, the innocent lamb
who grazed and bleated in paradise.
- 9 By that song of praise brides awoke suddenly
and chose chastity, and virgins
preserved their chastity, and even young girls
were purified. They rose early and came
in throngs to worship the Son.
- 10 The old women of the town of David came
to the daughter of David, speaking blessings:
"Blessed is our native land whose streets are made light
by the ray of Jesse! Today the throne of David
is established by You, the Son of David."
- 11 Old men cried out, "Blessed is the Babe
Who restored Adam's youth; he was displeased to see
that he grew old and wasted away, yet the serpent who killed him
shed [his skin] and recovered his youth. Blessed is the Babe
by whom Eve and Adam were restored to youth."²³³
- 12 The chaste women said, "Blessed Fruit,
bless our fruits, given to You
as first fruits." Aglow, they prophesied
about their children, who, when they were killed,
would be plucked by Him as first fruits.²³⁴
- 13 The barren women hovered over and held Him.
They caressed [Him] and said, "O Blessed Fruit [conceived]
without intercourse, bless our wombs
during intercourse."²³⁵ Have pity on our barrenness,
Miraculous Child of virginity."

233. The portrayal of Adam and Eve as children is common to several early Christian writers in the Greek and Syriac traditions, cf. Thphl. Ant. Autol. 2.25, Iren. A.H. 3.22.4, 4.38.1, and Demonstr. 12 and 14; Clem. prot. 11.111.1, Virg 12.12, and Murray, Symbols, 304–306. Ephrem uses this idea and adds the notion that in the Eucharist Christ restores their youth, cf. Graffin, Eucharistie. For ■ negative stress on their youth, cf. Nat. 26.8. As is often the case, Ephrem plays on the words *ḥw'* and *ḥwy'*, "Eve" and "serpent."

234. Cf. Matt. 2.16–18. The mothers of the slain innocents address Jesus. Their children are types of the resurrected faithful. They are the first fruits of the resurrection, to be plucked by Jesus immediately after his resurrection.

235. Here the temporal sense of the preposition *mn* is more appropriate than the comparative sense suggested by Beck.

8

This hymn begins with the theme of *kenosis*, God's accommodation to human limitations and sinfulness, in the incarnation. Stressing imagery particularly characteristic of Syriac Christianity, Ephrem elaborates on the theme of incarnation and then moves to soteriology: In the incarnation the divine and human natures are mixed like the pigments of an artist; Christ, salt of the earth, is the new Adam to be swallowed up by the serpent; the lance that barred entrance to paradise has pierced the side of Christ and thereby regained entry to paradise for humankind.

In the fifth strophe Ephrem advocates an understanding of Christ's behavior as a model of nonviolent behavior for human beings. In the subsequent strophes (str. 6–12), Ephrem chooses a variety of images to represent the saving work of Christ as well as his role as divine Logos and judge. Farmers, vineyard laborers and carpenters give thanks to Christ—these professions may have been chosen because they adapt easily to the theological imagery, or they may be indicative of the social and economic positions of the Christian community to whom Ephrem was addressing himself.

Next follows a series of strophes (str. 13–15) recalling women from scripture: Sarah, Rachel, Anna and Elizabeth. Although the first example stresses Isaac as a type of Christ, the emphasis is on the women themselves and their prayers for fertility. These strophes serve several functions in the hymn: 1) they serve as a female counterpart to the strophes immediately preceding, addressing the concerns of the ordinary woman in the Christian community; 2) they elaborate Old Testament types for Jesus and especially for Mary; and 3) they provide a foil of the *qal w boomer* type for Mary's prominence; if these women were blessed by God in answering their prayers, how much more was Mary blessed in the birth of a Son greater than all his predecessors and conceived without Mary's even asking (str. 16–17).

The final strophes of the hymn portray the praises of other representative social groupings: bridegrooms and brides, children, women and unmarried girls. Again, it is unclear whether aptness of theological imag-

HYMN 8

ery has prompted Ephrem's choice or whether it is an attempt to be as inclusive as possible. Bridal imagery is prominent both with and without ascetic emphasis (str. 21 and 19, respectively). It is tempting to construe the emphasis on poor women (str. 20) as an indication of the social and economic status of Ephrem's audience.

8

The same melody

- 1 Blessed is the Messenger who came bearing
a great peace.²³⁶ By the mercy of His Father,
He lowered Himself to us.²³⁷ Our own debts
He did not take up to Him. He reconciled
[His] Lordship with His chattels.

Refrain: Glory to Your Dawn, divine and human.

- 2 Glorious is the Wise One Who allied and joined
Divinity with humanity,
one from the height and the other from the depth.
He mingled the natures like pigments
and an image came into being: the God-man.²³⁸
- 3 O Zealous One who saw Adam
who became dust and the accursed serpent
eating him.²³⁹ Reality dwelt
in what had lost its flavor. He made him salt
by which the cursed serpent would be blinded.²⁴⁰
- 4 Blessed is the Compassionate One Who saw, next to paradise,
the lance that barred the way

236. Or simply, "a great greeting."

237. Cf. Phil 2.6–11.

238. Cf. SdF 92.

239. Similarly, of Eve, Nat. 17.6. Although Ephrem uses *ḥwy'*, "serpent" or "snake," we are perhaps to be reminded of the "reptile" or "dragon," *ṯnyn'* that swallowed Adam and Eve, cf. Nat. 1.27 and Virg 37.1. Further, cf. Yousif, Croix, 42–45; also cf. Stephen E. Robinson, *The Testament of Adam: An Examination of the Syriac and Greek Traditions* (SBLDS 52, Chico, Cal, 1982), esp. 142, nn. 29f., and my review in CBQ 47 (1985), 540f.

240. The idea seems to be that the serpent is fooled by the incarnation, a notion common in Gnostic texts but not usually portrayed with the imagery used here.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- to the Tree of Life. He came to take up
the body that would be struck so that by the opening in His side
He might break through the way into paradise.²⁴¹
- 5 Glorious is the Compassionate One Who did not use
violence, and without force,
by wisdom He was victorious. He gave a type
to human beings that by power
and wisdom they might conquer discerningly.
- 6 Blessed is Your flock for You are her gate,²⁴²
and You are her staff, and You are her shepherd,²⁴³
and You are her drink; You [are] her pilot²⁴⁴
and her overseer.²⁴⁵ O to the Only-begotten
Who was fruitful and multiplied in all [His] benefits.²⁴⁶
- 7 The farmers who cultivated life
came and worshipped before Him. They prophesied to Him,
bursting into song, "Blessed is the Farmer
by Whom is worked the earth of the heart;
He gathers His grains of wheat into the storehouse of life."²⁴⁷
- 8 The laborers came to give glory
to the offshoot that sprang forth from the root
and the stem of Jesse, the virgin cluster
of a parched vine. "Let us be the vessels
for Your new wine that renews all."²⁴⁸
- 9 "In You may my friend's vineyard that gives sour grapes
find peace. Graft its vines

241. For Ephrem, the flaming "sword" of the angel in Gen. 1.24 is a type of the lance that pierced the side of Jesus according to John 19.34. The idea occurs also in HdP 2.1, CJ 3.14.1, Comm. Diat. 21.10, Eccl. 45.3.1, Cruc. 9.2, and in CNis 39.7; cf. Murray, Lance; also Murray, Symbols, 125–27.

242. John 10.7.

243. On Christ the Shepherd, cf. Murray, Symbols, 187–91.

244. Or "salt." Although the punctuation of the ms. and the meter favor "pilot of a ship," (cf. Beck), the references to salt in strophe 3 make that reading also plausible. Perhaps Ephrem is deliberately evoking the double meaning.

245. Or "visitor" of the sick, whence "healer;" cf. Beck.

246. Christ as *yhydy*, the Only-Begotten or the solitary one, is represented by the solitary ascetics, who are his imitators par excellence. Ephrem plays on this notion by alluding to Gen. 1.28. On *yhydy* cf. Murray, Symbols, 12–16.

247. Cf. Matt. 13.30; on Christ as Farmer and vineyard Laborer, cf. Murray, Symbols, 195–99.

248. Cf. Mark 2.22 et par. On Christ as the "cluster of grapes," cf. Murray, Symbols, 113–29.

HYMN 8

with Your slips. Let it be laden entirely
with Your blessings. Let its fruit appease
the Lord of the vineyard who threatened him."²⁴⁹

- 10 Carpenters came because of Joseph
to the son of Joseph. "Blessed is your offspring,
the Chief of carpenters, by Whom was drawn
even the Ark.²⁵⁰ By Him was constructed
the temporal Tabernacle that was [only] for a time."²⁵¹
- 11 "Confess in the name of our craft."²⁵²
that You are our pride. May You make the yoke
that is light and easy upon those who bear it.²⁵³
May You make the measure in which deceit
cannot be, for it is full of truth.
- 12 "Also may You construct and make a balance"²⁵⁴
from justice, so that whoever steps
onto it will be judged, and whoever is perfect
will be celebrated on it. O Just One, may You weigh
mercy and sins in it, as a judge."
- 13 When Sarah sang lullabyes to Isaac
as to a servant who bore the image
of the King, his Lord: upon his shoulders
the sign²⁵⁵ of the cross, also upon his hands

249. Isa. 5.1–7.

250. Both for Noah's Ark and for the Ark of the Covenant the Peshitta often uses *qbwt'* (cf. Pes. Gen. 6.14–8.19 and Pes. Exod. 25.10–22, 37.1–9). Here Ephrem uses *kwyl'* as in Pes. Luke 17.27 and Matt. 24.38; further, cf. Payne-Smith I, 1693, II, 3451f. On Christ as Architect, cf. Murray, Symbols, 218–28, esp. 223–28.

251. Cf. Exod. 26.1ff., Exod. 36.8ff., Exod. 40. Both the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle were taken as cosmological symbols in Judaism and subsequently in Syriac Christianity; cf. McVey, Microcosm. Thus, Christ the Architect is the Architect of the Cosmos, the δημιουργός or λόγος of Greek philosophy and theology.

252. The Syriac *'wmnwt'* is equivalent to Greek τέχνη. Ephrem's attitude to craftsmen is radically different from the traditional Greek attitude; cf. Virg 11 and 12.2 and Beck, TEXNH; for a consideration of the issue in the Greek and Latin Patristic literature in its classical context, cf. Arthur T. Geoghegan, *The Attitude towards Labor in Early Christianity and Ancient Culture*, Studies in Christian Antiquity 6 (Washington, D.C., 1945).

253. Matt. 11.28–30.

254. On the balance as a symbol of judgment, cf. Patrick Brunn, "Signes, symboles et monogrammes," *Acta Instituti Romani Finlandiae*, I (1965), libra s.v.

255. "Sign" stands for Syriac *mys'* which is usually the equivalent of *r'z'*; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 260.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- bonds and pains, a symbol of the nails.²⁵⁶
- 14 Rachel cried out to her husband; she said,
 "Give me sons!"²⁵⁷ Blessed is Mary
 for, without her asking, You dwelt in her womb
 chastely, O Gift
 Who pours Himself out upon His recipients.
- 15 Anna with bitter sobs
 asked for a child;²⁵⁸ Sarah²⁵⁹ and Rebekah²⁶⁰
 with vows and words, and even Elizabeth,²⁶¹
 again, with her prayer [asked] for a long time.
 Although they suffered, afterward they were consoled.
- 16 Blessed is Mary, who without vows
 and without prayer, in her virginity
 conceived and brought forth the Lord of all
 the sons of her companions who were and will be
 pure and just men, priests and kings.
- 17 Who will sing a lullabye to the child of her womb
 as Mary [did]? Who will dare
 to call her son, Son of the Maker,
 Son of the Creator? Who has ever existed
 who called her son, Son of the Most High?
- 18 Bridegrooms shouted joyfully with [their] brides,
 "Blessed is the Babe whose mother was
 bride of the Holy One. Blessed [was] the marriage feast
 at which You were present: even though its wine
 suddenly was depleted, by You it became plentiful again."²⁶²
- 19 The children cried out, "Blessed [is] He Who was for us

256. Gen. 22.6–9. Isaac carrying the wood and then bound for sacrifice was seen by early Christians as a type of Christ carrying his cross and then crucified. It is a frequent theme of early Christian art; cf. F. Cabrol, "Abraham" DACL 1.9 (Paris, 1907) col. 111–127 and H. Leclercq, "Isaac" DACL 7.2 (Paris, 1927) col. 1553–1577. For the theme in Syriac Christianity and its Jewish antecedents, cf. S. Brock, "Sarah and the Aqedah," *Le Muséon* 87 (1974) 67–77; idem, "Genesis 22 in Syriac Tradition," in P. Casetti et al., eds, *Mélanges Dominique Barthelemy: études bibliques* (Göttingen, 1981); idem, "Two Syriac verse homilies on the binding of Isaac," *Le Muséon* 99 (1986) 61–129.

257. Gen. 30.1.

258. 1 Sam. 1.9–20.

259. Cf. Gen. 16.1ff., 17.15ff., 18.9ff.

260. Cf. Gen. 25. 21f.

261. Cf. Luke 1.5–25.

262. Cf. John 2.1–12.

HYMN 8

- a brother and companion in the streets.
 Blessed is the day that with branches
 glorified the Tree of Life
 Who inclined His height toward our childishness."²⁶³
- 20 Women heard that behold a virgin indeed
 would conceive and bring forth.²⁶⁴ Well-born women hoped
 that He would shine forth from them, and elegant women
 that He would appear from them. Blessed is Your height
 that bent down and shone forth from the poor.
- 21 Even little girls taken by Him [as brides]
 spoke prophetically, "Yours, Lord, let me be,
 for I am ugly, to You I am fair,
 and if I am lowly, to You I am noble.
 The bridal chamber that passes away have I exchanged for You."²⁶⁵
- 22 Since youth is both bold
 and talkative, the young girls gathered,
 daughters of the Hebrews, wise women,
 and the mourners, and with their soft words
 changed dirges into prophecy.²⁶⁶

263. Cf. Mark 11.1–11 et par., esp. Matt. 21. 15f., the source of the notion that children played an important role here. Ephrem plays on the similarity of "streets" *šwq'* and "branches" *swk'*.

264. Isa. 7.14.

265. Bridal imagery is associated especially with asceticism in early Syriac literature, e.g., the Odes of Solomon, Acts of Thomas, Aphrahat and Ephrem, cf. Murray, Symbols, 131–42, 255f.

266. Cf. Jer. 9.16–21, Joel 3.1 and Acts 2.17.

9

This hymn begins by accentuating the uniqueness of Mary's motherhood through the majesty of her Son. In the first strophe Ephrem stresses that Mary addresses her Son as both divine and human. Then he considers these two aspects in turn: as Son of the Creator, he creates his own body in the womb and descends from the presence of his Father (str. 2); in his human aspect he inherits the promises given to the Jewish people (str. 3). He is heir to the priesthood of Melchizedek, the kingship of David and the nation of Abraham. Ephrem's choice of Melchizedek rather than Aaron and Abraham rather than Moses is probably meant to stress the applicability of God's promises to the Gentiles.

Mary is the harbor into which the Old Testament types come to rest as ships. The promises given to David and the prophets are fulfilled in Jesus born of Mary. In this context Ephrem refers to Psalm 110, a basis for both royal and priestly messianic claims traced through David and Melchizedek. Along with Psalms 24 and 68 this psalm provided the scriptural basis for the earliest Christian claims concerning the ascension of Christ.²⁶⁷ Less typically, Ephrem interprets a number of the psalms as a mystical indication of the divine and human natures of Christ.

But Ephrem's emphasis here is on the female mediators of the messianic promise as much as on the males. Returning to a theme he began in the previous hymn, the presentation of the women of the Old Testament as foils for Mary, Ephrem chooses three women from the Matthean genealogy of Jesus who maintained the continuity of the line from Abraham to David to Jesus through extramarital sexual relations: Tamar, Ruth and Rahab (str. 7 ff.). Stressing Tamar (str. 8–13) and Ruth (str. 12, 14–16), Ephrem construes their behavior as motivated by the anticipation and love of the Messiah, that is, Jesus.

267. J. Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1956), 303–18.

HYMN 9

9

The same melody

- 1 Who will dare speak to her son
as in prayer, to the hope of his mother
as God, to her beloved [child] and her son
as man. In fear and love
it is right for Your mother to stand before You.

Refrain: Praise be to You on the day of Your manifestation²⁶⁸ for Your flock.

- 2 You are the Son of the Creator, Who resembles His Father.
As Maker, He made Himself in the womb;
He put on a pure body and emerged;
He made our weakness put on glory
by the mercy that He brought from His Father's presence.
- 3 From Melchizedek, the high priest,²⁶⁹
the hyssop came to You; a throne and a crown
from the House of David; a family and a people
from Abraham. Who will speak
so to her son as Your mother to You?
- 4 "I became a haven for Your sake,
great Sea. Behold, the psalms
of Your father David and also the words
of the prophets, like ships
discharged in me Your great wealth.
- 5 David, Your father, wove and brought for You
Psalm one hundred and ten,
two numbers, as a crown.
O Victorious One, with them You were crowned,
and You ascended and sat down upon the right hand.
- 6 The great crown is the number
that is woven with the hundred; with it Your divinity

268. Or "sunrise," or Epiphany, cf. Nat. 1.6.

269. Gen. 14.17–20; cf. Ps. 110.4 and Hb. 5.6. In each of these, as in Ephrem's hymn here, the word used is *kwmr*, a more general designation for priest than *kbn*, a specifically Aaronic or Levitical priest. In other works Ephrem specifies when the transmission of the Old Testament priesthood passed to Jesus: either when Jesus was presented to Simeon in the Temple (de Dom. nos. 50.6) or at the moment of his baptism by John (CH 22.18, and Comm. Diat. p.94f.); cf. Graffin, Eucharistie; Saber, Typologie, 84–86.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- is crowned. The small crown,
the number ten, crowns the head
of Your Humanity, O Glorious One.
- 7 Because of You,²⁷⁰ women pursued
men: Tamar²⁷¹ desired
■ man who was widowed, and Ruth²⁷² loved
a man who was old. Even Rahab,²⁷³
who captivated men, by You was taken captive.
- 8 Tamar went out and in darkness
she stole the light, and by filth
she stole chastity, and by nakedness
she entered furtively to You, the Honorable One,
Who produces chaste [people] from the licentious.
- 9 Satan saw Him and was afraid and ran
as if to hinder [her]; He reminded [her] of judgment,
but she feared not, of stoning and the sword
but she was not afraid.²⁷⁴ The teacher of adultery
was hindering adultery to hinder You.
- 10 For the adultery of Tamar was chaste
because of You. For You she thirsted,
O Pure Fountain. Judah cheated her
of drinking You. A thirsty fount
stole Your drink from its source.
- 11 She was a widow for Your sake.
She desired You, pursued You, and even
became a harlot for Your sake.
For You she longed, You she kept [in memory], and she became
a chaste woman.²⁷⁵ She loved You.
- 12 May Ruth receive good tidings, for she sought Your wealth;
Moab entered into it. Let Tamar rejoice

270. Cf. Matt. 1.1–17 and Nat. 1.13 and note ad loc.

271. Gen. 38.6–30.

272. Ruth 3.10.

273. Jos. 2.1–22, 3.22–25.

274. Gen. 38.24; as Beck has noted, Judah speaks of burning Tamar, not of stoning or execution by the sword. Lev. 20.10 and Deut. 22.22 prescribe death as the penalty for adultery but do not specify the means.

275. I have not accepted Beck's suggestion that Ephrem has translated the Hebrew *gedēša* with *mqdšt'* meaning "sacred [prostitute]" since, as he notes, it does not appear in the Peshitta or in the dictionaries.

HYMN 9

that her Lord has come, for her name announced
the son of her Lord, and her appellation
called You to come to her.²⁷⁶

- 13 By You honorable women made themselves contemptible,
[You] the One Who makes all chaste. She stole You
at the crossroads, [You] Who prepared the road
to the house of the kingdom. Since she stole life,
the sword was insufficient to kill her.
- 14 Ruth lay down with a man on the threshing floor
for Your sake. Her love was bold
for Your sake. She teaches boldness
to all penitents. Her ears held in contempt
all [other] voices for the sake of Your voice.
- 15 The fiery coal that crept into the bed of Boaz
went up and lay down. She saw the Chief Priest
hidden in his loins, the fire for his censer.
She ran and became the heifer of Boaz.
For You she brought forth the fattened ox.
- 16 She went gleaning for love of You;
she gathered straw. You repaid her quickly
the wage of her humiliation: instead of ears [of wheat],
the Root of kings, and instead of straw,
the Sheaf of Life that descends from her.

276. Ephrem plays on the similarity between the pronunciation of Tamar's name (*tmr*) and the phrase, "Come, my Lord!" (*t' mry*). For the use of similar phrases in the earliest liturgical contexts, cf. 1 Cor. 16.22, Rev. 22.20, and *Didache* 10.

10

This hymn is a strongly-worded defense of the claims of Christianity against criticisms apparently emanating from Ephrem's Jewish contemporaries. He begins with a bare statement that Jesus is superior to the twelve sons of Jacob, the fathers of the tribes of Israel (str. 1). He immediately shifts the focus of the hymn, however, to a defense of the resurrection of Christ evidently against accusations that the disciples stole the body of Jesus (str. 2, 3). He proceeds with his defense first by drawing typological links between the tomb of Christ, the den in which Daniel was enclosed and Lazarus' tomb (str. 4). Doubling back to make a more straightforward historical argument, he invokes the Matthean account of the burial of Jesus, which claims that the tomb was sealed and guarded to prevent the disciples' stealing the body; this fact should be sufficient to stop the mouths of the slanderers (str. 5). In a manner that should delight devotees of semiotics or of Freud or Jung, he next argues that the resurrection of Jesus constitutes a proof by analogy of the virgin birth (str. 6–10); further, the typological precedents of the resurrection also apply to the virgin birth (str. 6). Finally, he adds another parallel to show the lack of foundation for the doubts of Jesus' resurrection: Despite belief in the ascension of Elijah, some searched in vain for his body; just as they were proved wrong, so are those who doubt the resurrection of Jesus (str. 11–12).

10

The same melody

- 1 When Leah and Rachel, Zilpah and Bilhah,
sang lullabies to those fair
twelve that they bore,²⁷⁷ their soft words

277. The four are the mothers of Jacob's children; Zilpah and Bilhah are the maids of Leah and Rachel; cf. Gen. 28.24, 29.

HYMN 10

- were human; lordly are
all Your lullabies, Lord of His brothers.
- 2 So that even Your resurrection might be believed
among the doubters, inside the sealed
grave they placed You, for they sealed [it] with a stone
and guards stood [there].²⁷⁸ It was for Your sake
that they sealed Your grave, O Son of the Living One.
- 3 When they buried You, if they had given up,
left You and gone, there would be occasion
to assert falsely that they really stole You,²⁷⁹
O All-saving One. Contriving
to seal Your grave, they increased Your glory.
- 4 Types for You were both Daniel
and Lazarus: the one in the den
that the peoples sealed,²⁸⁰ and the other in the grave
that the people opened.²⁸¹ Behold their signs
and their seals confuted them.
- 5 Open would be their mouth if they had left open
Your grave and gone away. Since they shut up Your grave
and sealed and secured [it], they have shut up their mouth.
And although they desired it not, all the slanderers
covered their heads²⁸² since they covered Your grave.
- 6 But by Your resurrection You convinced them
about Your birth, for the den was sealed
and the grave was secured—the pure one on the den
and the living one in the grave. Your witnesses were
the sealed den and grave.²⁸³
- 7 The womb and Sheol shouted with joy and cried out
about Your resurrection. The womb that was sealed,
conceived You; Sheol that was secured,

278. Matt. 27.62–66.

279. Matt. 28.11–15.

280. Dan. 14.10, 30; the “peoples” are the Gentiles. Aphrahat makes similar comparisons of Daniel with Jesus, cf. Aph. Dem. 21.18.

281. John 11.39, 41; the “people” is the Jewish people.

282. Beck suggests, plausibly, that they have covered their heads in shame; cf. Tonneau, Gen/Exod CSCO 152 (scr. syr. 71), 81.30f.

283. I.e., the virgin birth and the resurrection.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- brought You forth. Against nature
the womb conceived and Sheol yielded.
- 8 Sealed was the grave which they entrusted
with keeping the dead man. Virginal was the womb
that no man knew. The virginal womb
and the sealed grave like trumpets
for a deaf people, shouted in its ear.
- 9 The sealed womb, the secured stone:
among the slanderers the conception is slandered,
that it was human seed, and the resurrection,
that it was human robbery. Seal and signet
refute and convince that He was a heavenly one.
- 10 The people stood between Your birth
and Your resurrection. If they slandered Your birth,
Your death reproved them. [If] they dismissed your resurrection,
Your birth confuted them. The two athletes
have struck the mouth that slandered.
- 11 Elijah, too—they went seeking him
among the mountains.²⁸⁴ While those on earth
were seeking him, it became all the more clear
that he had been taken up. Their seeking without finding Him
bore witness that he had been lifted up.
- 12 But if the prophets who were aware of
the ascension of Elijah, doubted, as it were,
his ascent, how much indeed would impure men
have slandered the Son? By their [own] guards
I shall convince them that He has been resurrected.

284. 2 Kgs 2.1–18.

11

In this hymn Ephrem explores the paradoxical relationship of Mary to Jesus as the basis for the paradox of *kenosis*. Inverting the reasoning of the previous hymn, the unnatural conception of Jesus provides a kind of proof of his divinity. If one cannot understand how Mary is both virgin and mother, how much less is it possible to comprehend her Son! (str. 1). Moreover, Mary is mother, sister and betrothed of Jesus (str. 2–4). Finally, the kenotic theme is developed in two respects: First with respect to Mary: She cared for her Son because He willed to become in need of care (str. 5). Second with respect to all creation: By entering Mary's womb he is transformed from Lord, Establisher, Ruler, Nourisher of all into a needy and helpless infant (str. 6–8). Alluding to the Magnificat of the Lucan infancy narrative, Ephrem gives the latter theme a prophetic note of social transformation (str. 7).

11

The same melody

- 1 Our Lord, no one knows
how to address Your mother. [If] one calls her "virgin,"
her child stands up, and "married"—
no one knew her [sexually]. But if Your mother is
incomprehensible, who is capable of [comprehending] You?

Refrain: Praise to You for Whom, as Lord of all, everything is easy.

- 2 For she is Your mother—she alone—
and Your sister with all. She was to You mother;
she was to You sister.²⁸⁵ Moreover, she is Your betrothed
with the chaste women.²⁸⁶ In everything,
behold, You adorned her, Beauty of Your mother.

285. Cf. Nat. 16.1.

286. Cf. Nat 4.132, Virg. 25.16, CH 17.5.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 3 For she was betrothed according to nature
before You came; yet she conceived
outside of nature after You came,
O Holy One, and she was a virgin
although she gave birth to You chastely.²⁸⁷
- 4 Mary acquired by You all the attributes²⁸⁸
of married women: conception within her
without sexual union, milk in her breasts
not in the usual way. You have suddenly made
the parched earth into a source of milk.
- 5 If she carried You, Your great mountain
lightened its burden. If she fed You
[it was] because You hungered. If she gave you a drink
[it was] because you willed to thirst. If she embraced You,
the coal of mercy²⁸⁹ preserved her bosom.
- 6 A wonder is Your mother: The Lord entered her
and became a servant; He entered able to speak
and He became silent in her; He entered her thundering
and His voice grew silent; He entered Shepherd of all;
a lamb he became in her; He emerged bleating.
- 7 The womb of Your mother overthrew the orders:²⁹⁰
The Establisher of all entered ■ Rich One;
He emerged poor. He entered her a Lofty One;
He emerged humble. He entered her a Radiant One,
and He put on a despised hue and emerged.
- 8 He entered, a mighty warrior, and put on fear
inside her womb. He entered, Nourisher of all,
and He acquired hunger. He entered, the One who gives drink to
all,
and He acquired thirst. Stripped and laid bare,
He emerged from [her womb], the One who clothes all.

287. This line seems to imply *virginitas in partu*; for a discussion, cf. Beck, Reden, 104. It is more clearly implied at Nat. 12.3.

288. The word is more usually translated "generation," "story," "matter," "subject," or ὑπόστασις. Beck translates "Eigenschaften."

289. Isa. 6.6–7; the implication is that Mary's role is ■ prophetic one; cf. str. 7, below, and HdF 10.10.

290. Luke 1.46–55.

12

Ephrem continues the kenotic theme and the theme of the transformation of might to lowliness in Mary's womb. Here he adds several new dimensions to these themes. After briefly meditating on the Infant who is older than his mother (str. 1), he turns to the idea of a sealed royal treasure. Here he evokes imagery associated with Jewish Hekhalot mysticism, on the one hand, and with Middle and Neo-Platonism, on the other. Mary's womb is a palace in which the King dwelt (str. 2). Miraculously, while the treasury remained sealed, Christ, the Signet of the King of Kings, the Logos of God, emerged (str. 3). Next, he turns to the natural symbol by which these religious mysteries are revealed to all: the physical evidence of virginity in all women (str. 4). This leads him to the issue of the remaining strophes: the role of the Christian women among his contemporaries who are dedicated to the celibate life (str. 5–11). He argues that the virginity of Mary is continued in these women dedicated to chastity, since Christ is also present in them in a unique way (str. 6). His remarks about "slanderers" seem to indicate the opposition of his rabbinic Jewish contemporaries to the Syrian Christian emphasis on celibacy as well as criticism of the belief in Mary's virginity (str. 7, 9).

12

The same melody.

- 1 Who indeed has seen the Babe Who is more ancient
than His bearer? The Ancient One entered
and became young in her. He emerged an infant
and grew by her milk. He entered and became small in her;
He emerged and grew through her—a great wonder!

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Refrain: Glory on Your day to Your hidden sunrise²⁹¹ and to the Father Who sent You!

- 2 Babe in the womb, since the seal²⁹² of virginity abides, the womb was for You the royal palace, and the curtain. Evidence of virginity upon it, evidence of virginity outside, ■ fetus inside—a great paradox!
- 3 O to the chest that was empty and sealed and, while [it was] secured, from within emerged the Great Signet²⁹³ of the King of Kings! The witness cries out that this gift is not of nature.
- 4 Womankind possessed the evidence of virginity because of You, to affirm that Yours was a holy conception. Within the seals dwelt Your purity. The seal refutes one who falsely claims that Your mother made false pretenses.
- 5 Within the seal You dwell even now within chaste women, and if anyone slanders Your brides,²⁹⁴ the silent seal, the curtain, rages out to meet him. The seal cries out that our King is there.
- 6 The seal witnesses to Your brides and to the one who bore You. Within the seal You were dwelling in Your mother, and in Your chaste women [You dwell] within the sign.²⁹⁵ Your seal will justify

291. Or “manifestation,” “Epiphany.”

292. The Syriac *ḥtm*, “seal,” indicates the wax or molten metal that was stamped with a signet to identify letters and possessions in antiquity. It is the equivalent of the Greek σφραγίς.

293. The Syriac *ṭb*, “signet,” is the instrument with which the wax or metal is stamped to identify the owner or sender of the material that it seals. It is the equivalent of the Greek σφραγίς. On the use of this imagery by Ephrem, cf. B. Vandenhoff, “Eine unveröffentlichte Abhandlung Ephraïms des Syrers Über die Bedrückten und Bedrängten,” in *Theologie und Glaube* 4 (1912), 239–41, and Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 254–58. On its use in early Christian literature in general and its Greco-Roman background, cf. Dölger, *Sphragis*.

294. Here and especially in strophes 7 and 9 Ephrem seems to indicate contemporary strife on this issue.

295. Although he uses *ṭb*, Ephrem seems to intend the meaning of “seal” rather than “signet.”

HYMN 12

- Your brides as it did Your mother.
- 7 Since chastity is [so] great that it is unbelievable
among the unclean, the seal and signet
of the King of kings persuades [them] that the pearl²⁹⁶
is preserved. Your maidservants acquire
good advocates among the slanderers.
- 8 If with a seal this treasure-house²⁹⁷
was not believed, without a signet
who would be able to believe
that it had not been pillaged? God convinced
[all] people for the sake of His saints.
- 9 You dwelt in Mary, but the unclean said falsely
that the fetus was not Yours.²⁹⁸ Since You dwell now
within chaste women, behold they are slandered
as [if they were] pregnant. They slander the pregnant one
and those who are not pregnant—a great atrocity!
- 10 Your bulwark keeps Your brides
as [it did] Your mother. If there were a thief
who came to steal, by You he would be thwarted
and consumed, and if there were a slanderer
who came to slander, by You he would be silenced.
- 11 Praise to You [Who] purify your flock
as Your mother, and Your chaste women
as the one who bore You, and Your handmaids
as the one who nursed You. From them and from her
and from all of us glory be to Your name!

296. On virginity ■ the “pearl of great price,” cf. *Virg* 2.4.

297. I.e., Mary.

298. I.e., not divine.

13

Ephrem continues to focus on women, beginning this hymn by invoking the image of the women of Israel singing joyful songs rather than laments (str. 1). Their joyful songs are the expression of their joy at the accomplishments of their offspring—in Ephrem’s eyes, not as an end in themselves but as types of the accomplishments of Christ. Beginning with Eve who rejoices in anticipation of her rescue from Sheol by “the Son of her daughter” (str. 2), Ephrem proceeds to a rather vague indication of Sarah’s appreciation of Isaac as a type of Christ (str. 3). Isaac’s importance as ■ type of the crucified Christ has already been mentioned in an earlier hymn (Nat. 8.13), but this notion will be extended in this hymn to make Isaac a type of the rule of non-retaliation against wrong inflicted (str. 17).

First Ephrem finds types for Christ’s victory over Satan in Samson and Samuel (str. 4–5). But they are not just representatives of victory, they also anticipate the “sweetness” of Christ: Samson in the honeycomb found in the carcase of the lion and Samuel who wept over Saul. Thus they represent Jesus, both divine and human, whose “judgment is powerful” while his “love is sweet” (str. 6–9).

The circumstances and behavior of Christ meet with the expectations neither of a Davidic messiah (str. 10–11) nor of an infant (str. 12–13) nor of a just God (str. 14–15). But, especially in the final strophes (str. 15–17), Ephrem suggests that Christ is “greater than the Law which requires recompense,” and that he is the norm by which the leaders of the Old Testament and their religion are to be judged, rather than the reverse.

13

The same melody

- 1 The Hebrew daughters, who sang
the laments of Jeremiah instead of the laments
of their scripture, intoned lullabyes

HYMN 13

from their Bible.²⁹⁹ Hidden power
was prophesied in their words.

Refrain: Praise be to You from all that You have created on this Your feastday!

- 2 Therefore they answered, "Today let Eve
rejoice in Sheol, for behold the Son of her daughter
as the Medicine of Life³⁰⁰ came down to save
the mother of His mother—the blessed Babe
Who will crush the head of the serpent that wounded her.³⁰¹
- 3 Your type looks out from the youth
of the fair Isaac. At You looked
Sarah who saw that Your mysteries dwelt
upon his childishness: "O son of my vows
in whom is hidden the Lord of my vows!"
- 4 The Nazirite, Samson, gazed at the type
of Your courage. He tore the lion apart,
the likeness of death.³⁰² You ripped [death] asunder
and made the sweet life³⁰³ emerge
from its bitterness for human beings.
- 5 Anna, moreover, in You embraced
Samuel also, for Your justice
was hidden in him who tore Hagag apart³⁰⁴
as [You did] the Evil One. He wept over Saul,³⁰⁵
for Your goodness was also portrayed in him.
- 6 How humble You are! How powerful You are!
O Infant, Your judgment is powerful!
Your love is sweet! Who is able
to stand against You? Your Father [is] in heaven
and Your mother on earth. Who is able to speak about You?

299. "Scripture" and "Bible" here translate Ephrem's *spr'* and *ktb'*, both in the plural. They do not appear to be distinguished for any technical reason but simply for the sake of variety; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 252.

300. Cf. Ign. Eph. 20.2.

301. Gen. 3.15. On the punishment of the serpent, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 112–18, also Nat. 17.6, 21.15, 22.31, 26.8 and 28.5.

302. Judg. 14.6. Perhaps the spirit of Samson's riddles, Judg. 14.14 and 18, Ephrem engages in word play here with *dmwy' dmwt'*, "the likeness of death."

303. Another play on words: *hy' hly'*, "sweet life."

304. 1 Sam. 15.32f.

305. 1 Sam. 15.35.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 7 If anyone seeks Your hidden nature
 behold it is in heaven in the great womb
 of Divinity.³⁰⁶ And if anyone seeks
 Your revealed body, behold it rests and looks out
 from the small womb of Mary!
- 8 The mind wanders among your attributes,³⁰⁷
 O Rich One! Copious inner chambers
 are in Your godhead, contemptible appearances
 in Your humanity. Who will measure You,
 Great Sea Who made Himself small?
- 9 We came to see You as God.
 Behold! You are a human being. We came to see You
 as a human being—the banner of Your godhead
 shines forth! Who can bear
 Your transformations, O True One?
- 10 We came to see the way of life that was Your lot
 from the House of David. From [among] his beds
 You inherited a manger.³⁰⁸ From [among] his palaces
 a cave was Your lot.³⁰⁹ Instead of his chariot
 the despised ass now is Your lot.³¹⁰
- 11 Who would believe that You have inherited
 the throne of David? We go away to scorn,
 to disregard You. Heaven cries out
 and the earth below. After we have scorned
 we bow before You, the Hidden Power!
- 12 How bold You are, Babe, Who bestows Himself
 upon all. At everyone who meets You

306. For an important precedent for Ephrem's graphic use of feminine language for God, cf. Odes of Solomon 19.

307. Here and in the following strophe Ephrem considers the "transformations" undertaken by the immutable Deity for the sake of self-revelation to finite creatures. Cf. Virg 28.11. For a discussion of the theological importance of this idea, cf. de Halleux, *Mar Ephrem*, 45–47.

308. Luke 2.7.

309. The cave does not appear in the canonical infancy narratives, but it is mentioned in non-canonical and Patristic literature, cf. Prot. 18–21, Just. dial. 78, Or. c. Cels. 1.51. By the fourth century it was a pilgrimage site, and a Constantinian basilica was constructed there. For further discussion of the site, cf. Wilkinson, *Pilgrims*, 151f. and H. Chadwick, *Origen's Contra Celsum*, (Cambridge, England, 1965), 47, n.5. The tradition of the cave was well-established in the Byzantine iconographic tradition of the Nativity; cf. Ouspensky, *Icons*, 157–59.

310. Matt. 21.5 et par. Ephrem may also have Zech. 9.9f. in mind since there the Messiah brings peace and banishes chariots along with other instruments of warfare.

HYMN 13

- You smile. To meet everyone who sees You
 You eagerly wait. It is as if Your love
 hungers for human beings.³¹¹
- 13 You distinguish not Your parents
 from strangers, nor the one who bore You
 from maidservants, nor the one who nursed You
 from harlots. Is this Your boldness³¹²
 or Your love, all-merciful One?
- 14 What moves You to bestow Yourself
 upon each who has seen You—upon the rich
 and upon the poor? With them You take shelter³¹³
 without their invoking You. From where did it come to You
 so to hunger for human beings?
- 15 What is Your love that if anyone rebuke [You],
 You are not angry, and if one cry out,
 You are not terrified, and if one scolds You
 You are not gloomy? Are You indeed greater
 than the Law that requires recompense?
- 16 Meek was Moses, yet harsh was his zeal,
 for he struck and killed.³¹⁴ Elijah also,
 who revived the youth, let the mob of boys
 be torn apart by the bears.³¹⁵ Who are You, youth,
 that Your love is greater than [the love] of the prophets?
- 17 That son of Hagar who was a wild ass,
 kicked Isaac. He endured and was silent,
 but his mother was jealous.³¹⁶ Are You his symbol
 or is he Your type? Do you resemble Isaac,
 or, indeed, does he resemble You?

311. Literally, "Your love resembles [a love] that hungers."

312. "Boldness" or perhaps better "impulsiveness," *ḥwspʿ* is here opposed to "love," *ḥwbʿ*. Further on this theme, cf. Nat. 14.1, where Ephrem assumes that "boldness" is inappropriate to royalty as well as to divinity.

313. The same word means "to represent as ■ type," a denominative verb from *ṭwpsʿ*.

314. Num. 12.3 and Exod. 2.11f.

315. 2 Kgs 4.18–37 and 2 Kgs 2.23–25.

316. Gen. 16.12 (Pes.); cf. HdF 79.3; and Gen. 31.9.

In this hymn Ephrem picks up the question he posed in the previous hymn and answers it from a different perspective. The question is, “How can this infant be son of David or Son of God?” (Nat. 13.10–15) Ephrem begins his answer with the idyllic image of the royal child at rest in his mother’s lap (str. 1). This child is son of Mary and son of David (str. 1), yet he is also son of the “chaste one” and Son of the Hidden One (str. 2). He brings to humankind rest, peace and joy, for he is Philanthropos—a virtue appropriate to kings as well as to God (str. 1–6).

To elaborate the point that Jesus is truly son of David, Ephrem comments on David’s dance and Michal’s criticism of it (2 Sam. 6; str. 7–9). David anticipates Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, while Michal anticipates both the Jewish rejection of Jesus as son of David, i.e., as royal messiah, and the contemporary critics of Christianity (str. 8, 10).

In the remaining strophes Ephrem argues first that the Jewish skepticism of Mary’s virginity and of the virginity of the “daughters of the covenant” is not unexpected. The Mosaic laws concerning the testing of accusations of female unchastity show this to be true (str. 11–15). Second, he argues that chastity was the source of superhuman power exercised by Elijah, Elisha and Moses (str. 16–19). Unlike Zipporah, who was chaste despite her pagan parentage, “the daughter of Abraham,” i.e., the Israelites, went whoring with the golden calf (str. 19).

Ephrem’s argument in the second half of this hymn is an interesting variant on the usual Patristic approach to the Old Testament. It is fairly predictable that a fourth-century Christian writer would divide the *dramatis personae* of the Old Testament into positive and negative characters and interpret the positive figures as antecedents of the Christians while negative figures are seen as the forerunners of the Jews.³¹⁷ What is different here is the principle of choosing the positive models; the figures chosen from the Old Testament narrative are not unexpected—Elijah, Elisha and Moses. But the understanding of their importance is unex-

317. For discussion of this approach, cf. Ruether, *Fratricide*, esp. 117–82.

HYMN 14

pected; they are presented as the equivalent of neo-Platonic holy men, the *theioi andres* of the Old Testament.³¹⁸

14

The same melody

- 1 Come rest and be quiet in the lap³¹⁹ of Your mother,
Son of the Honorable One.³²⁰ Boldness is not fitting
for the sons of kings. You are son of David,
that honorable one, and son of Mary,
who keeps her beauty in the inner chamber.

*Refrain: Praise be to You Who on this day delight all.*³²¹

- 2 Who resembles the cheerful Babe,
the fair Child, Whose mother is chaste,
and His Father [is] the Hidden One Whom not even the Seraphim
are able to see;³²² Whom do You resemble?
Tell us, Son of the Compassionate One.
- 3 You delighted in the angry who came
to gaze at You. They mingled their laughter
with one another's. The wrathful were made sweet

318. For the definition of the term θεῖος ἄνθρωπος and for ■ treatment of its growing significance for Christians in Late Antiquity, cf. L. Bieler, *θεῖος ἄνθρωπος: Das Bild des "Göttlichen Menschen" in Spätantike und Frühchristentum* (Wien, 1935; rep. Darmstadt, 1967); P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *JRS* 61 (1971), 80–101; D. L. Tiede, *The Charismatic Figure as Miracle Worker*, SBL Diss. ser. 1, (Missoula, Montana, 1972). P. Cox, *Biographies in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, 1985); G. P. Corrington, *The "Divine Man": His Origin and Function in Hellenistic Popular Religion*, American University Studies, ser. 7, Theology and Religion 17 (New York, 1986), with an overview of the literature, 1–58, reviewed by Tiede in *CBQ* 49 (1987), 497–99. For a similar phenomenon in rabbinic Judaism, cf. Neusner, *HJB* II, 236–40 et passim.

319. Or "bosom" or "womb." The Syriac is 'wb'.

320. I.e., Son of God, cf. str. 2; or within the context of this strophe, simply son of David. One suspects that Ephrem enjoys the ambiguity.

321. Or "offer the Passover for all." Despite the unseasonableness of such a reference in a nativity hymn, the ambiguity here may be deliberate on Ephrem's part since this hymn emphasizes the sweetness and alleviation of anger brought by Christ.

322. *SdF* 1.43.; Beck, *Reden*, 52. Simply put, since Mary is chaste, the Father of Jesus is God.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- by You, Pleasant One. Who are You, O Youth,
that even the bitter are sweetened by You?
- 4 Who has seen a babe who eagerly awaits
those who approach? From the bosom
He reaches out toward those far away.
A fitting sight: The Babe Who muses
entirely on everyone that they may gaze at Him.
- 5 One who came to see you with a worry—
his worry fled, and one who was brooding
in You forgot his brooding. In You the hungry one forgot
even his food. And the one who had been sent out
by You was enticed to forget his way.
- 6 You Yourself are at rest, but have released humankind³²³
to their affairs. You are a son of the poor;
know what is the spirit³²⁴ of each of the poor
who ceased to work and came. Lover of humankind,³²⁵
You have enveloped humankind in Your joy.
- 7 David the king, that honorable one,
took branches, and on a feastday,
dancing among the children,
he gave glory.³²⁶ Is it not the love
of David Your father glowing in You?
- 8 In that daughter of Saul the demon of her father
spoke.³²⁷ She called dissolute
that honorable one who gave an example
to the elders of the people to take branches
with the children on the day of Your praise.³²⁸
- 9 Who will not fear to reproach You
with rashness? For behold, because Saul's daughter
vomited forth evil, her womb was deprived³²⁹

323. Ephrem uses alliteration here: *šly nps' wšry 'ns'*.

324. "Spirit" here translates *nps'*, which usually means life principle or soul rather than an attitude. Although it is unattested in this sense, it seems appropriate here. (Beck declines to translate it.)

325. The Syriac *rhym 'ns'* seems to be the equivalent of Greek φιλόανθρωπος.

326. 2 Sam. 6.5, 14.

327. 2 Sam 6.16–22, 1 Sam 18.10f.

328. Mark 11.1–11 et par.

329. The Syriac involves a pun: *gst* "she vomited" and *gst* "it was deprived."

HYMN 14

- of childbearing. Since her mouth mocked,
the wage of her mouth was her barrenness.³³⁰
- 10 Let mouths shrink in fear from blaspheming You,
lest they be stopped up. Daughter of Sion,
hold your tongue about that Son of David
Who surpasses you in glory. Be not
like the daughter of Saul whose family history is complete.³³¹
- 11 God saw how much the unclean people,³³²
whoring and envious,
were slanderous, but He had pity
upon women. For our sake
He increased His stratagems³³³ among the slanderers.
- 12 If her spouse should hate her,
he was to write to dismiss her,³³⁴ and if he were jealous,
they tested her [with] water,³³⁵ and if he slandered her
[her father] presented the cloth.³³⁶ All slander
was frustrated in the presence of Mary, who was sealed.
- 13 Moses had already exposed
how slanderous they were, for although cloths
of virgins are possessed by their families,
they have accused them and killed them.
How much more they slandered the mother of the Son!
- 14 By water ordeals and by cloths
He taught them, so that when the Lord of conceptions
came to them, and they slandered that womb
in which He dwelt, pure evidence of virginity
concerning her conception would convince us about it.
- 15 If, therefore, the evidence of virginity made public
would save the wife of a man
from the sword, O wise women,

330. Cf. 2 Sam. 6.23.

331. Or, more innocuously, "whose story is completed;" cf. Beck, "deren Erzählung in Erfüllung ging."

332. The Jewish people in the Old Testament.

333. *purs'* from Greek πόρος; i.e., the tests for adultery were God's way of protecting innocent women against false witness.

334. Deut. 24.1-4.

335. Num. 5.11-30.

336. Deut. 22.13-19, which mentions both parents, but here the verb is masculine singular.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- preserve it and be preserved by it. It is weapon that,
turns around and does battle with its master, if he is guilty.³³⁷
- 16 Since Elijah repressed
the desire of his body, he could withhold the rain
from the adulterers.³³⁸ Since he restrained his body,
he could restrain the dew from the whoremongers
who released and sent forth their streams.
- 17 Since the hidden fire, bodily desire,
did not prevail in him, the fire of the high place
obeyed him,³³⁹ and since on earth he conquered
fleshly desire, he went up to [the place] where
holiness dwells and is at peace.³⁴⁰
- 18 Elisha, too, who killed his body,
revived the dead.³⁴¹ That which is by nature
mortal, gains life by chastity,
which is beyond nature. He revived the boy
since he refined himself like a [newly] weaned [infant].
- 19 Moses, who divided and separated himself
from his wife,³⁴² divided the sea
before the harlot.³⁴³ Zipporah maintained
chastity, although she was the daughter of [pagan] priests;³⁴⁴
with a calf the daughter of Abraham went whoring.³⁴⁵

337. Deut. 22.19.

338. 1 Kgs. 17–18, esp. 17.1

339. 2 Kgs 2.1–11. For holy high place *rwum*; cf. 1 Kgs 18.38 and 2 Kgs 1.10.

340. The ambiguity of the Syriac *qdyšwt* ("holiness" or "chastity") better suits the context.

341. 2 Kgs. 4.32–38.

342. Ephrem thinks that the dismissal of Zipporah (Exod. 18.2) was for the sake of chastity and that it was provoked by the angel's visitation in Exod. 4.24–26; cf. Pr. Ref. II.75, 35–45.

343. Israel.

344. Pagan priests, *kwmr*'.

345. Exod. 32.

Ephrem places this hymn in the mouth of Mary and at the moment of the offerings of the Magi (str. 4). In it he stresses four themes, all of which contribute to a portrayal of Mary and her role in prophetic terms. At the same time he toys with the language and imagery of fertility religion (str. 1), arguing, in effect, that the new message of Christianity is the reinterpretation of fertility in allegorical and spiritual terms (str. 5–6). First, Mary is the instrument of Christ's will in his role as Logos or Son of God (str. 1, 4–5). Second, God chose poor people rather than the rich for his revelation (str. 2–3). Third, Mary is the lyre, the mouthpiece of Christ. Despite slander and oppression she sings a new song (str. 5–7). She will be vindicated as Tamar was (str. 8). Finally, David prophesied the visit of the Magi in his psalms, which must all be interpreted Christologically (str. 9–10).

15

The same melody

- 1 "With You I shall begin, and I trust
that with You I shall end. I shall open my mouth,
and You fill my mouth.³⁴⁶ I am for You the earth
and You are the farmer. Sow in me Your voice,³⁴⁷
You who are the sower of Himself in His mother's womb.

346. Ps. 81.10, where the filling of the mouth is with food; here, it is with the prophetic word. Cf. HdF 10.1.

347. Up to this point, Ephrem has combined the language of fertility religion with prophetic language. Despite the fact that "voice" (Syriac *ql'*) is not the equivalent of Word (*lōgōs*, Syriac *mlt'*), this phrase seems to suggest divine impregnation of Mary as yet another level of meaning for the entire strophe. The final line shows that this is Ephrem's intent. On the use of fertility language in an ascetic context, cf. Beck, *Mariologie*, 31; also Nat. 17.6, 21.16–18, 26.8, Virg 24.11, 52.1f., and Kronholm, *Motifs*, 218, 223.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

*Refrain: Glory be to You, my Lord, and through You to the Father, on the day of
Your nativity.*

- 2 "All the chaste daughters of the Hebrews
and virgin daughters of rulers
are amazed at me. Because of You, a daughter of the poor
is envied. Because of You, a daughter of the weak
is an object of jealousy. Who gave You to me?
- 3 "Son of the Rich One, Who despised the womb
of rich women, what drew You
toward the poor? For Joseph is needy,
and I am impoverished. Your merchants
brought³⁴⁸ gold to a house of the poor."
- 4 She saw the Magi;³⁴⁹ her songs increased
at their offerings: "Behold Your worshippers
surround me, and their³⁵⁰ offerings
encircle me. Blessed be the Babe
Who made His mother the lyre of His melodies.
- 5 "And since the lyre looks toward its master,
my mouth looks toward You. Let Your will arouse
Your mother's tongue.³⁵¹ Since I have learned by You
a new way of conceiving, let my mouth learn by You
a new [way of] giving birth to new glory.
- 6 "If difficult things for You are not difficult
but easy, so that the womb conceived You
without intercourse, and without seed
the womb gave birth to you, it is easy for the mouth
to be fruitful and to multiply³⁵² Your great glory.
- 7 "Behold, I am slandered and oppressed,
but I rejoice. My ears are full
of scorn and disdain, but it is a small matter to me
how much I shall endure, for a single [word of] consolation from
You

348. Literally, "carried and brought."

349. Matt. 2.1–12.

350. Although Beck's text reads "Your," it is apparently in error since he translates "their" offerings, which makes more sense.

351. Cf. HdF 25.1–3.

352. Cf. Gen. 1.22, 28.

HYMN 15

is able to chase away myriads of griefs.

- 8 “Since I am not despised by You, my Son,
I am confident. I who am slandered
have conceived and given birth to the True Judge
Who will vindicate me. For if Tamar
was acquitted by Judah,³⁵³ how much more will I be acquitted by
You!
- 9 “David, Your father, sang a psalm to You
before You came, that to You would be offered
gold of Sheba.³⁵⁴ The psalm
that he merely sang [now] in reality
heaps before You myrrh and gold.
- 10 “The hundred and fifty psalms he sang
were flavored by You since all the words
of prophecy are in need
of Your seasoning. For without Your salt
all wisdom would lose its savor.”

353. Gen. 38.26.

354. Ps. 72.15.

16

In this hymn, presented as Mary's song to her infant, Ephrem has crafted a theological treatise on the nature of God's presence in Mary and the manner in which that instance of God's presence in the world is related to other manifestations of God in the world. The first strophes concern the ways in which Christ is present in the world other than His presence in Mary's womb: in the lives of Christians (str. 1), ruling the world as Logos and Son of God (str. 2–3), in the eucharistic bread and wine as well as in the human mind (str. 4–7).

Recapitulating Mary's multiple roles with respect to Jesus (str. 9; cf. Nat. 11.2–4 and 16.1), Ephrem adds one more: Along with all other Christians, Mary is Jesus' daughter, brought forth by him in blood and water at baptism (str. 8–11). Again, like all Christians, in baptism Mary put on the "glory" of Christ, the glorious body that had been lost at the Fall. Conversely, in the incarnation, Christ put on the garment of the body made for him by his mother (str. 11). Through the paradox that the mother of Jesus is also his daughter, Ephrem has led us back once more to the mysteries of the incarnation and the virginity of Mary.

In the final strophes Ephrem uses imagery drawn from the Jewish priestly cult to describe Mary's role. The virginity of Mary and of all the "daughters of the covenant" is the vestment of the High Priest, who is Christ (str. 13). Like the Ark of the Covenant, Mary is honored not for herself but for the divine presence within her (str. 16). She is also the Tablets containing the teachings of the Mosaic Law (str. 17). To grasp the significance for Ephrem of these metaphors one must remember that in Syriac "virginity" (*btwlwt*) is synonymous with "chastity" (*qdyšwt*), which also means "holiness." Behind the coincidence in meanings between "chastity" and "holiness" is ultimately a notion of mysterious power, untouchable sacral presence. Mary as the virgin *par excellence* is uniquely suited to be the holy one in whom—or almost the holy place in which—God deigns to be present.

HYMN 16

16

The same melody

- 1 "I shall not be jealous, my Son, that You are both with me
and with everyone. Be God
to the one who confesses You, and be Lord
to the one who serves You, and be brother
to the one who loves You so that You might save all.
- 2 "While You dwelt in me, [both] in me and outside of me
Your majesty dwelt. While I gave birth to You
openly, Your hidden power
was not removed from me. You are within me,
and You are outside of me, O Mystifier of His mother.
- 3 "When I see Your outward image
before my eyes, Your hidden image
is portrayed in my mind.³⁵⁵ In Your revealed image
I saw Adam, but in the hidden one
I saw Your Father who is united³⁵⁶ with You.
- 4 Have You shown your beauty in two images
to me alone? Let bread and the mind
portray You.³⁵⁷ Dwell in bread
and in those who eat it. In hidden and revealed [form]
let your church see You as [does] the one who bore You.
- 5 "Whoever hates Your bread is like that one
who hates Your body. A distant one
who loves Your bread [is like] a near one
who cherishes Your image. In bread and body
the former and the latter have seen You.
- 6 Indeed, Child, Your bread is far more honorable
than Your body. For even the unbelievers³⁵⁸

355. The hidden image is of the divine nature; it is the *imago dei*. The outward, revealed, image is the human nature, as the following lines show. Ephrem's distinction between inner (or hidden) and outward (or revealed) knowledge is reminiscent of the ἐπιστημονικὸς λόγος and δοξαστικὸς λόγος of Middle Platonic epistemology; cf. Dillon, *Platonism*, 273f.

356. Literally, "mixed" (Syriac *mzg*); Ephrem's language would be problematic for post-Chalcedonian Christology.

357. A second dimension is added to the ways of knowing God; for believers after the time of the incarnation the Eucharist and the mind become the outward and inner ways.

358. Or "doubters," a term Ephrem often applies to the Jews, but here it would seem to include any of Jesus' contemporaries who did not join his following. Rather than referring to the

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- saw Your body, but they do not see
 Your living bread. The distant ones rejoiced;
 their portion surpassed that of the near ones.
- 7 “Behold Your image is portrayed with the blood of the grapes
 upon the bread³⁵⁹ and portrayed upon the heart
 by the finger of love with the pigments
 of faith. Blessed is He Who made
 graven images pass away by His true image.
- 8 “You are not [merely] a human being that in an ordinary way
 I should sing You a lullabye. For Your conception is a new thing,
 and Your birth is a miracle. Without the Spirit
 who could sing to You? A new utterance
 of prophecy seethes in me.
- 9 What can I call You, a stranger to us,
 Who was from us? Shall I call You Son?
 Shall I call You Brother? Shall I call You Bridegroom?
 Shall I call you Lord, O [You] Who brought forth His mother
 [in] another birth out of the water?³⁶⁰
- 10 “For I am [Your] sister from the House of David,
 who is a second father.³⁶¹ Again, I am mother
 because of Your conception, and bride am I
 because of your chastity. Handmaiden and daughter
 of blood and water [am I] whom You redeemed and baptized.³⁶²
- 11 “Son of the Most High Who came and dwelt in me,
 [in] another birth, He bore me also
 [in] a second birth. I put on the glory of Him
 Who put on the body, the garment of His mother.
- 12 Amnon disgraced³⁶³ Tamar who was
 from the House of David, and virginity

disciplina arcana as Beck suggests, Ephrem alludes to those who saw Jesus in the flesh but did not believe.

359. Dölger, AC 5 (1936), 275ff.; and cf. CH 35.1.

360. Although *mwld*, here translated “Who brought forth,” is used of men as well as women, the immediate context is more appropriate to birth than to begetting. On Jesus as mother in Greek and Latin Patristic literature, cf. Bradley, Background.

361. David is second after God the Father (or Joseph?) rather than after Jesus; cf. Nat. 6.1–2.

362. Despite Ephrem’s emphasis on Mary’s role as second Eve, here he makes it clear that she is redeemed along with all humankind by Christ; cf. Beck, Mariologie, 28.

363. The *paēl* perfect rather than *p’al* participle (as it is pointed in Beck’s text) is necessary for the sense of the passage. 2 Sam. 13.1–22.

HYMN 16

- fell and perished from the house of both of them.³⁶⁴
 My pearl, placed in Your treasury,
 has not perished, for You have put it on.³⁶⁵
- 13 "May all evidences of virginity of Your brides
 be preserved by You. They are the purple [robes]
 and no one may touch them
 except our King. For virginity
 is like a vestment³⁶⁶ for You, the High Priest.³⁶⁷
- 14 "Tamar reeked of the smell of her father-in-law,
 for she had stolen perfumes.³⁶⁸ Not even the slightest scent
 of Joseph wafted from the garments of his bride.
 For the Balsam that I conceived, Your conception, became for me
 a wall of fire, O Son of the Holy One."
- 15 The blossom lost its scent, for the fragrance of the Glorious Lily
 was strong. The Treasure of Perfumes
 had no need of the flower
 or of its fragrances.³⁶⁹ The flesh stayed away,
 for it saw in the womb the conception of the Spirit.
- 16 Woman serves in the presence of man,
 who is her head.³⁷⁰ Joseph rose
 to serve in the presence of his Lord
 Who was within Mary. The priest serves
 in the presence of Your Ark³⁷¹ because of Your holiness.

364. Or, with Beck, this could be translated "from between both of them." Since both Amnon and Tamar were from the house of David, the present translation seems preferable.

365. The pearl is Mary's virginity (cf. Virg 2.4-5, 2.10, 3.12), but virginity is also the vestment of the High Priest (cf. str. 13 below and note ad loc.) and the body is a garment (Nat. 4.187-88 and note ad loc.). Thus Jesus "puts on" the pearl (virginity) of Mary—and it is his body. Ephrem's metaphor's are mixed, but deliberately!

366. The same word *šwšp'* is used for the cloth that constituted proof of a bride's virginity; cf. Nat. 14.12.

367. Ephrem uses *kwmr'* rather than *kbn'*, following the usage of the epistle to the Hebrews rather than Leviticus. Like the author of the epistle, Ephrem stresses ■ priestly heritage extrinsic to the Mosaic covenant; cf. Hb. 5.1, 7.1ff.

368. Cf. Gen. 38.1-30. The imagery in this and the following strophes is loosely related to the Song of Songs, esp. 1.3, 1.12-2.3.

369. The Syriac is alliterative: *pqḥ' pkb bw' . . . šwšn šwbḥ' . . . symt bsm'*. The presence of Christ (the Glorious Lily and the Treasure of Perfumes) in Mary's womb made sexual intercourse with Joseph (the flower) superfluous, as Ephrem states more directly in the following line.

370. 1 Cor. 11.3.

371. Jesus is not only the presence of God (Emmanuel—God with us) and thus prefigured as the presence within the Ark, but he is also the Word of God (λόγος), hence prefigured by the scripture contained within the Ark; Mary is the Ark; cf. Nat. 4.113 and 12.3.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 17 Moses bore the tablet of stone
that His Lord had written. And Joseph escorted
the pure tablet in whom was dwelling
the Son of the Creator. The tablets were left behind
since the world was filled with Your teaching.³⁷²

372. Cf. Exod. 32.15; here, too, the understanding of Jesus as *λογος*, Word of God, provides the connection with "God's writing" on the tablets. During her pregnancy Mary is, then, the tablet. The tablets of the Mosaic Law are rendered superfluous by the teaching of Christ.

This hymn begins with an ascension motif. Like many of the supposed authors of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature, Mary is transported into the air to receive a revelation. The divine person of Christ in the form of a great bird is not only bearer and revealer but also the subject of the revelation. The content of the revelation to Mary is the cosmic role of Christ: "He promised me, 'the height and the depth will be your Son's.' " (str. 1). Mary names a series of others who recognized the dignity of Christ: Gabriel, Simeon, Herod and Satan (str. 2-3). These are drawn from the canonical infancy narratives.

By providing the body of Christ, Mary, the new Eve, has provided for all the garment of glory, the resurrection body (str. 4). The life of consecrated virginity is the means by which the new creation continues to transform the world. In contrast to Eve, especially, the woman consecrated to virginity is the dwelling place of God. (str. 5-6). Yet all, male and female, slave and free, clean and unclean, are encouraged to take up the yoke of virginity (str. 8-11).

Christ is "the Son of the Creator Who came to renew the whole creation" (str. 11.4-5). This renewal has both cosmic and human dimensions (str. 12-14). In an anti-Marcionite vein, Ephrem argues that Jesus' healings and his bringing the dead back to life prove that he is the Son of the Creator and himself the Creator as well. Jesus' love for the human body is shown by his healings. They demonstrate that Jesus is not, as Marcion would have it, son of a Strange God, but he is Son of the just Lord of the Universe (str. 15-18).

The same melody

- 1 "The Babe that I carry has carried me,"
said Mary. "He bent down His pinions

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

and took and put me between His wings
and soared into the air. He promised me,
'the height and the depth will be your Son's.' ³⁷³

Refrain: Praise to You, Son of the Creator, Who loves all!

- 2 "I saw Gabriel who called him Lord
and the High Priest, the aged servant³⁷⁴
who solemnly carried him. I saw the Magi
bowing down and Herod
dismayed that the King had come.
- 3 "Satan, too, who drowned boys
so that Moses would perish, kills boys [now]
so that the Living One will die. I shall flee to Egypt³⁷⁵
since [Satan] has come to Judah, so that he will become weary and
confused—
he who seeks to hunt his Hunter.
- 4 "In her virginity Eve put on
leaves of shame.³⁷⁶ Your mother put on,
in her virginity, the garment of glory
that suffices for all. I gave
the small mantle³⁷⁷ of the body to the One who covers all.
- 5 "Blessed is the woman in whose heart
and mind You are. She is the King's castle³⁷⁸

373. A similar motif occurs in *The Apocalypse of Abraham* 15. After Abraham and an angel have been carried up to the presence of God on the wings of a pigeon and a turtledove, respectively, Abraham joins in an angelic song of praise to God; cf. *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, ed. and trans. by G. H. Box, SPCK (London, 1918). I am grateful to Martha Himmelfarb for pointing out this parallel. The representation of Christ as a bird also has some parallels in early Christian literature. In Matt. 23.37 Jesus compares himself to a mother hen. Various Greek and Latin Patristic writers saw the mother hen as a particularly appropriate image for Christ as the Divine Wisdom; cf. Bradley, Background, esp. 103–108. Beck comments briefly on this passage in Beck, Mariologie, 25.

374. Simeon; cf. Luke 2.25–35.

375. Matt. 2.13–18; in Ephrem's version, Mary rather than Joseph seems to be the initiator of the flight. Ephrem explicitly draws the parallel implied by Matthew's account; cf. Exodus 1.22.

376. Cf. HdP 2.7 and 6.9, Virg 35.2.

377. The word *prys*' is rich in meanings. In addition to any small covering, mantle or rug, it may mean the breastplate of the high priest, the veil of the Temple, or (as a feminine) the flat wafer of the Eucharist (Margoliouth 460b). Further, cf. Beck, Mariologie, 30.

378. The Syriac is *byrt*', not *bykl*'.

HYMN 17

- for³⁷⁹ You, the King's Son, and the Holy of Holies
 for You, the High Priest. She has neither the anxiety
 nor the toil of a household and husband.³⁸⁰
- 6 "On the other hand, Eve became a cave and grave
 for the accursed serpent, for his evil counsel
 entered and dwelt in her; she who became dust
 became bread for him.³⁸¹ [But] You are our bread,
 and You are our bridal chamber and the robe of our glory.
- 7 "If she who is chaste³⁸² is afraid,
 behold the guard [of her chastity]. If she [commits] a wrong,
 behold its pardoner. If she has a demon,
 behold its pursuer. And [for] those who have pains,
 behold the binder of their wounds.
- 8 "Whoever³⁸³ has a body, let him come to be
 a brother to my Beloved. Whoever has a daughter
 or kinswoman, let her come to be
 the bride of my Honorable One. And whoever has a slave,
 let him release him to come to serve his Lord.
- 9 "My Son, one is the wage of the free-born man
 who has taken up Your yoke. But the slave who has borne
 the double yoke of two lords,
 of the One above and one below, receives two blessings
 and the two wages of the two burdens.
- 10 "My Son, the free-born woman is also Your handmaiden
 if she serves You, and the enslaved woman
 in You is a freewoman. By You she is consoled
 that she is a freed woman. Invisible emancipation
 is placed in her bosom if she loves You.
- 11 "O chaste woman, eagerly await my Beloved
 so that He may dwell in you, and unclean women, too,

379. Or "by You."

380. The freedom of the virgin—male or female—from the anxieties of the householder is a common theme in early Christian ascetic literature. Although the authority of 1 Cor. 7.32–35 is often invoked, the catalogue of woes owes much to pagan literature, e.g., Tert. exh. ad. cast. 12; Greg. Nyss. de virg. 3; John Chrys., de virg. 14.6, 56.1.

381. The serpent is condemned to crawl on his belly and eat dust, cf. Gen. 3.14.

382. Literally, "who has chastity."

383. In this strophe the hypothetical person having a son or daughter is addressed as female, whereas the hypothetical slaveowner is addressed as male.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

so that He may purify you; churches, too,
so that He may adorn you. He is the Son of the Creator
Who came to restore the whole creation.

- 12 "He renewed the sky since fools worshipped
all the luminaries. He renewed the earth
that had grown old because of Adam. A new creation³⁸⁴
came to be by His spittle,³⁸⁵ and the All-sufficient
set straight bodies and minds.
- 13 "Come, you blind, and without money³⁸⁶
receive sight. Come, you lame,
receive your feet. You mute and deaf,
receive your voices. And let those with maimed hands³⁸⁷
receive [whole] hands.
- 14 "The Son of the Creator is He Whose treasures are full
of all benefits. Let the one
who needs eyes come to Him.
He will make clay and transform it.
He will make flesh. He will enlighten eyes.
- 15 "With a little clay He showed that by His hand
our dust was formed.³⁸⁸ The soul of the dead man
also witnessed that the human soul
was breathed in by Him.³⁸⁹ By the latter witnesses
it is verified that He is the Son of the First One.
- 16 "Gather, you lepers, and without effort
receive your purification. For He does not need
as Elisha [did] to have [you] plunge in
seven times.³⁹⁰ Nor again will He weary [you]

384. The Syriac word, *gbylt'* from the root *gbl* "to form, to shape" suggests the image of a potter. The image and the word itself (*gbl*) appear in str. 14 and 15.

385. I.e., by his miracles of healing, cf. John 9.6.

386. I.e., without paying a doctor or healer.

387. The Syriac has a singular here, plural in the following line.

388. Ephrem interprets John 9.6 in relation to Gen. 2.7; the healing shows that Christ is the same One Who created the first human being; cf. also Job 4.19, 10.9. Although Ephrem's interpretation of this detail in the Johannine pericope is not supported by modern scholars, the same idea was elaborated with the same anti-Marcionite polemical intent by Irenaeus in Adv. Haer. V.15.2; cf. Brown, Gospel According to John, I, 369–82, esp. 372.

389. John 11 is here interpreted in the light of Gen. 2.7. On the Creator breathing life into Adam, cf. Kronholm, Motifs, 216.

390. 2 Kgs. 5.10.

HYMN 17

- as the priests did with their sprinklings.³⁹¹
- 17 "The seven of Elisha in a symbol cleansed
the seven spirits,³⁹² and hyssop and blood
are a great type:³⁹³ There is no place
for strangeness; the Son of the Lord of the universe
is not estranged from the Lord of the universe.³⁹⁴
- 18 "For if the Just One makes the body leprous,
and You purify [it], [then] the One Who formed the body
hates the body and You love it!
But You formed it! The pledges³⁹⁵ that you have cast
upon it cry out that You are the Son of the Creator.

391. Lev. 1.1–32. Here the Syriac word for priest is *khn'*.

392. The seven washings prescribed by Elisha typologically represent the seven evil spirits cast out from Mary Magdalene; cf. Luke 8.2 and Mark 16.9. Or the reference may be to the seven evil spirits who replace one in the parable, cf. Matt. 12.45, Luke 11.26.

393. The priestly remedies, cf. Lev. 14.4–7, are also antetypes of Christ the High Priest.

394. Here and in the final strophe Ephrem makes an explicitly anti-Marcionite polemic: the Father of Jesus is not a Stranger God but is the Creator of the universe.

395. I.e., the healings, as Beck suggests.

Ephrem begins this hymn by invoking the association of the birth of Jesus with the reign of Caesar Augustus. This association has its basis in Luke 2.1–3, but for Luke it probably had an apologetic significance that was also appreciated by Ephrem.³⁹⁶ The reign of Augustus was seen as a peaceful Golden Age, and Christians were quick to appropriate the imagery as the cornerstone of their apologetic historiography: Good emperors, beginning with Augustus, favor Christianity, while the bad rulers persecute it.³⁹⁷ Ephrem gives Luke's theme his characteristic typological twist: Augustus is a type of the real King who is Christ (str. 1–3).

The bulk of the hymn is a recounting in thirty-one strophes the thirty years of Jesus' life. Each strophe calls upon an element in the creation to give thanks for the incarnation. Ephrem's principle in choosing the participants in the hymn of praise is somewhat obscure. Only two years have associations from the presumed chronology of Jesus' life: the twelfth year associated with the Temple, and the thirtieth year associated with the dead. For the rest, Ephrem begins with three groups of angels: Cherubim, Seraphim and "the house of Michael." He proceeds to major elements in the cosmos: the sky, sun, air, dew, all creation, the earth, Mt. Sinai[!] and the sea. Then there are major New Testament images for Christ: the Lamb and the Vine; images common in parables: leaven and salt; and Old Testament antetypes of Jesus: Isaac, Moses and Job[!]. Other imagery is drawn from the court of law: lawyers and judges; or is representative of various forms of power: diadems, wealth, armor and swords, and mighty men. In every case Ephrem plays on a paradoxical correspondence between the person or thing in question and the actions of Jesus in the incarnation. The power or vastness of the creature is contrasted with a carefully chosen instance of the *kenosis* of the Son of the Creator.

396. For a discussion and further bibliography, cf. Brown, *Messiah*, 412–18, esp. 415f., 547–56.

397. T. D. Barnes, "Legislation against the Christians," *JRS* 58 (1968), 32–50, esp. 32–35.

HYMN 18

18

The same melody

- 1 In the years of that king, who is called
"Radiance,"³⁹⁸ our Lord shone forth
among the Hebrews, and "Radiance" and "Dawn"³⁹⁹
came to rule: a king on earth
and the Son on high. Blessed be His power!

*Refrain: To You be praise Whose on this feast bestowed gladness upon all [people].*⁴⁰⁰

- 2 In the days of the king who enrolled people
for the poll tax,⁴⁰¹ our Savior descended
and enrolled people in the Book of Life.⁴⁰²
He enrolled [them], and they enrolled Him. On high He enrolled
us;
on earth they enrolled Him. Glory to His name!
- 3 His birth [was] in the days of the king
whose name is "Radiance." The symbol and the truth⁴⁰³
encounter one another: king and King,
"Radiance" and "Dawn." That kingdom bore⁴⁰⁴
His cross. Blessed be the One Who exalted [the kingdom]!
- 4 For thirty years⁴⁰⁵ He remained on earth
in poverty. My brothers, let us plait
hymns of praise in all varieties
for the years of our Lord: for thirty years
thirty crowns. Blessed be His nativity!
- 5 In the first year, mistress of treasures
and full of graces, let the Cherubim who bore

398. Caesar Augustus is clearly meant, but it is not clear how he is called "Radiance." Beck suggests a pun on Greek ἀπαύγασμα.

399. For *dnh'* as a messianic title, cf. Zech. 3.8, 6.12. (Pes.); also in LXX ἀνατολή, and in Vulg. *oriens*.

400. Or, "this feast celebrated the Passover for all." Cf. str. 18 below.

401. Luke 2.1-3; cf. also Acts 5.37.

402. Phil. 4.3 and Rev. 13.8, but in the Pes. both with *ktb'* rather than *spr* as Beck has noted.

403. *qwt'* instead of the more usual *šr'* as antithesis to *r'z'*.

404. The word may be taken either in the sense of "supported" or "tolerated."

405. Cf. Luke 3.23, which gives, about thirty years to the beginning of the ministry. If this is his source, Ephrem apparently takes *'yk* in the sense of "almost" thirty years, then apparently counts the ministry as less than a year.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- the Son in glory give thanks with us.⁴⁰⁶
 He left His glory and labored and found
 the sheep that was lost.⁴⁰⁷ To Him be thanksgiving!
- 6 In the second year let the Seraphim multiply
 thanksgiving with us. Those who called "holy" to the Son,⁴⁰⁸
 on the other hand saw Him reviled
 by the unbelievers. He endured scorn
 yet He taught praise. To Him be glory!
- 7 In the third year let the house of Michael⁴⁰⁹
 give thanks with us. Those who serve
 the Son on high saw that He served
 on earth—washed feet,⁴¹⁰
 cleansed souls. Blessed be His submission!
- 8 In the fourth year let the sky⁴¹¹ give thanks with us;
 its entirety is too small for the Son.
 It was amazed to see Him recline on the couch
 of the despised Zacchaeus.⁴¹² He filled the couch,
 and He filled the sky. To Him be majesty!
- 9 In the fifth year let the sun that scorches
 the earth with its breath give thanks to our Sun,
 Who inclined His height and softened His might
 so that the feeble eye of the hidden soul
 could see Him.⁴¹³ Blessed be His dazzling light!
- 10 In the sixth year let all the air
 give thanks with us. In [the air's] majesty

406. The Lord is enthroned upon the Cherubim, 1 Sam. 4.4; cf. Ezek. 1.5–21; hence they are particularly representative of the glory of God. Ephrem freely places the Son on the throne or chariot borne by the Cherubim; cf. CJ 3.17. Cramer argues that Ephrem's references are to the ascension rather than to the theophany described by Ezekiel; cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 132–34. However, Ephrem, like virtually every Christian writer from the second century onward, freely treats any Old Testament theophany as referring to the Son of God rather than (or as well as) God the Father.

407. Matt. 18.10–14, Luke 15.3–7; on the basis of CH 26.6 Beck understands the lost sheep explicitly as Adam.

408. Isa. 6.2–5.

409. I.e., the angels. Ephrem does not systematically set apart the archangels as a group; cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 72f.

410. John 13.3–17.

411. Or "heaven."

412. Luke 19.1–10.

413. Cf. Nat. 16.3.

HYMN 18

- the universe exults.⁴¹⁴ It saw its Lord,
the Great One who became a small babe
in a small womb. Blessed be His dignity!
- 11 In the seventh year, O clouds and winds,
rejoice with us, and, dew, sprinkle
upon the blossoms. For they have seen the Son
Who subjected His brightness and accepted mockery
and filthy spittle.⁴¹⁵ Blessed be His redemption!
- 12 Also in the eighth year,⁴¹⁶
let creation give glory. She, whose fruits drink
from her springs, worshipped when she saw
the Son in the womb, and the Pure One drank
pure milk. Blessed be His will!
- 13 In the ninth year let the earth give praise.
Her barren womb, when moistened,
soon gives birth. She saw
that the Fruit of the parched earth, Mary,⁴¹⁷
was a great sea. To Him be exaltation!
- 14 In the tenth year let Mount Sinai give glory,
for it melted⁴¹⁸ in the presence of its Lord.
It saw that they took up stones against its Lord.⁴¹⁹
It took stones to build His church.
upon stones.⁴²⁰ Blessed be His building!
- 15 In the eleventh year let the great sea
give thanks to the hand of the Son
that measured it,⁴²¹ and let it be amazed to see
Him descend to be baptized; in the little waters
He cleansed the creation. Blessed be His victory!
- 16 In the twelfth year let the holy Temple
give thanks that it saw the boy

414. Cf. HdP 9.14.

415. Mark 14.65 et par.

416. Literally, "Again in the year, the eighth one."

417. Literally, "that the parched earth, Mary, gave" cf. Nat 8.8, 11.4.

418. The reference is unclear.

419. John 10.31.

420. Matt. 16.18? More probably, as Beck suggests, the reference is to Juliana Saba, who built a church on Mt. Sinai; cf. Jul. Sab. 19.13-18.

421. Isa. 40.12.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- sitting among the elders.⁴²²
 Silent were the black [sheep], for the Festal Lamb
 bleated on His feastday. Blessed be His atonement!
- 17 In the thirteenth year let diadems
 give thanks with us to the King who was victorious
 and was crowned with a crown of thorns.⁴²³
 He plaited for Adam a great diadem
 upon the right hand.⁴²⁴ Blessed be His glory!
- 18 In the fourteenth year let the paschal lamb of Egypt
 give thanks to the Paschal Lamb who came
 and offered the Passover for all.⁴²⁵ But instead of Pharaoh
 Legion sinks; instead of horsemen
 He drowns demons.⁴²⁶ Blessed be His vengeance!
- 19 In the fifteenth year let the lamb of the flock
 give thanks that our Lord did not kill him
 as Moses [did],⁴²⁷ but with His blood He redeemed
 humankind. This Shepherd of all
 died for all. Blessed be his Begetter!
- 20 In the sixteenth year let the grain of wheat⁴²⁸
 give thanks in a symbol to that Farmer
 Who sowed His body in the barren earth
 that had failed to produce anything. It sprouted and gave
 new bread. Blessed be the Conqueror!
- 21 In the seventeenth year let the vine
 give thanks to our Lord, the True Vineyard.
 Souls were like young plants;⁴²⁹
 He cultivated [His] vineyard, but He destroyed the vineyard
 that gave sour grapes.⁴³⁰ Blessed be the One Who uproots!
- 22 In the seventeenth year let the vine

422. Luke 2.41–51.

423. Mark 15.16–20 et par.

424. Cf. HdF 50.5.

425. Or “and delighted all.” The same expression is used in the refrain of the present hymn and of Nat. 14.

426. Mark 5.1–20, esp. 5.13 et par.

427. Ephrem’s polemic against Judaism extends to a rejection of animal sacrifice on principle; cf. Nat. 7.4 and 18.30.

428. John 12.24.

429. Ephrem’s wordplay produces ■ Syriac tongue twister here! *bwy npšt’ ’yk nšbt’*

430. Isa. 5. 1–6.

HYMN 18

- eaten by the boar of the forest give thanks
to the True Vinedresser, who Himself worked
and guarded His fruit and offers fruit
to the Lord of the vineyard. Blessed be its Vinedresser!
- 23 In the eighteenth year, too,
let out leaven give thanks to the true leaven,⁴³¹
that moves through and expands all minds
and made them one mind
by one teaching. Blessed be your teaching!
- 24 In the nineteenth year let salt
give thanks to Your body, O Blessed Babe.
The soul is the salt of the body,
and faith is the salt of the soul,
by which it is preserved. Blessed be Your preservation!
- 25 In the twentieth year let temporal riches
give thanks with us. For the perfect
have forfeited them because of the curse,
and they have come to love poverty
because of its blessing.⁴³² Blessed be one who prefers it!
- 26 In the twenty-first year let the water that became sweet⁴³³
as a symbol of the Son give thanks.
By the honeycomb of Samson the peoples whom he destroyed
became bitter.⁴³⁴ They have come to life again by the cross
that redeemed them. Blessed be Your sweetness!
- 27 In the twenty-second year let armor and sword
give thanks. They were not sufficient to kill
the Enemy of our age. You have killed him,
but You attached the ear that Simon's sword
had cut off.⁴³⁵ Blessed be your healing!
- 28 In the twenty-third year let even the ass
give thanks. For she gave a foal

431. The leaven in the parables of the New Testament is not Christ but his kingdom; cf. Matt. 13.33 et par. cf. HdF 12.12, 25.9, CH 2.12.

432. Luke 6.20–24.

433. Exod. 15.25.

434. Judg. 14.5–20.

435. Cf. John 18. 10f. and Luke 22.51f. Although the other synoptics include the incident, cf. Mark 14.47 et par., only John identifies Peter as the assailant and only Luke includes the detail of Jesus' repair of the wounded ear.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- upon which He might ride Who opens the mouths
even of wild asses.⁴³⁶ The progeny of Hagar⁴³⁷
gave a shout. Blessed be Your shout!
- 29 In the twenty-fourth year let wealth
give thanks to the Son. Treasures marveled
at the Lord of treasures, as He grew
among the poor. He made Himself poor
that all might become rich. Blessed be Your mingling!
- 30 In the twenty-fifth year let Isaac
give thanks to the Son who spared him on the mountain
from the knife and became in his place
the sacrificial lamb.⁴³⁸ The mortal escaped
and the universal Life-giver died. Blessed be His offering!
- 31 In the twenty-sixth year let Moses
give thanks with us. For he was afraid and fled
from killers.⁴³⁹ Let him give thanks to the Son
Who entered Sheol on foot,⁴⁴⁰
plundered it, and emerged. Blessed be Your resurrection!
- 32 In the year that is twenty-seventh,
let eloquent lawyers give thanks to the Son.
They did not find a stratagem for our case.
When He conquered He was silent in the court;⁴⁴¹
yet he acquitted us. Glory to Him!
- 33 In the twenty-seventh year let all judges
give thanks. They, as just men,
have killed evil men. Let them give thanks to the Son
Who, in place of bad men, died as a good man
although He was Son of the Just One. Blessed be His mercy!
- 34 In the twenty-eighth year
let all mighty men give thanks to the Son.
For they did not save us from the Captor.

436. Literally, "the opener of mouths even for wild asses." Matt. 26.5, quoting Zech. 9.9.

437. Either the Arab tribes, as Beck suggests, or possibly it is the sedentary non-Jewish Semites who are meant.

438. Gen. 22.

439. Exod. 2.11–15.

440. Perhaps better as Beck translates, "after him"—essentially reading *lrglwby* in place of *brglwby*. Beck cites CH 55.3 and HdP 8.10 as grammatical and contextual basis.

441. Mark 14.61 and 15.5 et par.

HYMN 18

One alone is worshipped—He Who, being slain,
attained our salvation. Blessed be Your deliverance!

35 In the twenty-ninth year let Job
give thanks with us. He endured sufferings
for his own sake, but our Lord endured
spitting and scourging, thorns and nails
for our sake. Blessed be His compassion!

36 In the year that is thirtieth,
let the dead who were revived by His dying,
[and] the life that returned by His crucifixion,⁴⁴²
and the height and the depth that were pacified by Him
[all] give thanks with us! Blessed be He and His Father!⁴⁴³

442. Matt. 27.52.

443. The principal ms. tradition adds the following colophon to this, the last hymn in its collection: "Completed are the hymns of the nativity of our Lord that holy Mar Ephrem composed. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit now and in all times and for ever and ever. Amen."

19

Mary sings this hymn as a representative of the Jewish people (str. 3, 8, 18). Ephrem portrays the offering of the Magi to the infant Jesus as a reversal of the Assyrian Domination and the Babylonian Captivity. Their offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh rectify the injustices and suffering of the eighth to sixth centuries B.C. by bringing atonement for the Assyrians and Babylonians and consolation for the Jews (str. 1–4). The defeats of the past are contrasted with the homage rendered to the infant, Emmanuel (str. 5–11). Isaiah’s prophecy of the birth of Emmanuel provides a scriptural link between past humiliation and present honor (str. 7–8). In a sense Ephrem is arguing that Isaiah’s prophecy proves the accuracy of his own interpretation of the visit of the Magi.

In the second half of the hymn Ephrem argues that the majesty of Christ is much greater than what was lost (str. 12–17). Contact with Christ makes “even worthless [things] become beautiful” (str. 14). The references to the New Testament and to exaggerated awe for things touched by Christ (str. 15–16) suggest a context of pilgrimage. Finally, Mary closes with a rhetorical request that her Son teach her now to be silent and to rest (str. 18–19).

19

- 1 “Uzziah and Jotham and Ahaz were defeated
in their wars.⁴⁴⁴ Instead of captives
who went down to Assyria, the Magi came to us
with caravans. In our streets wafted
the good odor of their spices.

444. 2 Kgs. 15.1–7, 15.32–38, 16.1–20 (and 2 Chr. 26–28) indicate that only Ahaz suffered military defeats, although the others were chastised in other ways. The oracles of Isaiah mention all three, cf. Isa. 1.1.

HYMN 19

Refrain: To You be praise, Son of the Lord of the universe, Who saved all.

- 2 "Being the Son of the Compassionate One, You took pity on them
in Your kindness. Being the Son of the Zealous One,
You avenged them with your might.
Being the Son of the Rich One, according to [Your] love of them,⁴⁴⁵
they have paid their debts with their offerings.
- 3 "You juxtaposed [events] so that You might not grieve us
and You might save them: Those who had seized our⁴⁴⁶ silver,
brought gold. Those who had wounded our bodies,
brought myrrh. Those who had burned our sanctuary
offered frankincense to Your divinity.
- 4 "Their myrrh intercedes for their swords
with which they killed us. Their gold intercedes
for our treasures, for they plundered the treasuries
of the House of Hezekiah.⁴⁴⁷ Their frankincense appeased
Your divinity, for they had angered Your Father.
- 5 "Whereas Ahaz sent [word] to Assyria,
'Come and save me!'⁴⁴⁸—those who had been humbled,
by You were exalted. They came
with their pledges to You instead of Jechoniah,⁴⁴⁹
the hostage captured from the House of David.
- 6 "Where by his envoys Ahaz subjected
himself to Assyria,⁴⁵⁰ by You they are subjected
in their envoys. Whereas the sceptre of the lion's cub⁴⁵¹
rendered homage, the mighty who had received homage
rendered homage to you, O Worshipful One.

445. Although the meaning could be "their love," the objective genitive, viz., "love of them," is more appropriate to the context.

446. Mary speaks as a member of the Jewish people, referring to the Assyrian invasions of Israel under Tiglath-Pileser III, Shalmaneser, Sargon II and Sennacherib in the late eighth century B.C.; cf. 2 Kgs. 16–18 and Isa. 5.26–30.

447. 2 Kgs. 18.14f.

448. Ephrem quotes precisely the words of Ahaz to the Assyrian king, according to the Pes., 2 Kgs. 16.7.

449. Ephrem confuses matters by interjecting into his discussion this reference to considerably later events. Jechoniah, son of Jehoikim, was deported to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar at the beginning of the sixth century B.C.; cf. 2 Kgs. 24.10–16 and Jer. 24.1, 27.20, 28.4.

450. 2 Kgs. 16.7.

451. Gen. 49.9. Since Judah is the lion's cub, Ahaz, king of Judah, is the sceptre of the lion's cub.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- 7 "When Aram and Ephrem dared to attack,
Zion was afraid lest she be left bereft
of the House of David.⁴⁵² When Ahaz took flight
and abandoned [her],⁴⁵³ Isaiah
gave her Your good news of Emmanuel.
- 8 "Behold a virgin shall conceive and give birth"⁴⁵⁴
without intercourse. Am I having a dream
or a vision that, behold, upon my lap
is Emmanuel? I shall cease all [else]
and give thanks to the Lord of the universe each day.
- 9 "Whereas they despised virginity in Zion,
they honored Your mother, O virginal Child
Who put on the evidence of virginity of His mother
and emerged with it. To me You are Child,
Bridegroom and Son, even God.
- 10 "The Babylonians, too, came up [and] afflicted
the children in Judah.⁴⁵⁵ By You the children
have found peace, for by You the vicious
have become worshippers. Those who despised old men
honor a Child who is older than all.
- 11 "Babylon, too, sent offerings
to Hezekiah; the envoys who saw
his treasures were amazed.⁴⁵⁶ What did you show to
the Magi? You showed a wonder
for they rendered You homage although You were poor.
- 12 "However great was the ivory palace
of the kings of our people,⁴⁵⁷ greater
and more beautiful is the little cave
in which I bore You. In swaddling clothes
the shepherds saw Your glory.
- 13 "A small nature, if it wears a diadem,
by the diadem becomes great. Your nature is great,

452. This occurred during the reign of Ahaz, cf. Isa. 7.1–9, esp. 7.2.

453. Literally, "abandoned [her] and took flight and left."

454. Isa. 7.14–16. Emmanuel = "God with us."

455. Cf. note on Nat. 19.5.4 above.

456. Isa. 39.1–2 et par.

457. 1 Kgs. 22.39.

HYMN 19

- O son of poor people, and through You something small
 becomes great; if someone places
 thorns on Your head, they are like a diadem.
- 14 "A worthless body may be adorned
 with jewels. Through You, Honorable One,
 even worthless [things] become beautiful.
 So great is contact with You that even if someone
 cast a stone at You, it would be a pearl.
- 15 "Even your sweat, for one who is worthy,
 is a baptism,⁴⁵⁸ and the dust of Your garments,
 for one who is infirm, is a great fount
 of all aids,⁴⁵⁹ and even Your spittle,
 if it reach the face, would enlighten the eyes.⁴⁶⁰
- 16 "If upon a stone You should rest Your head,
 they would divide and tear it apart, and if You slept
 upon a dunghill, it would become a church
 for prayers, and if, again, You broke
 ordinary bread, for us it would be the medicine of life.⁴⁶¹
- 17 "Who will revile You? For even Your abuse
 is a blessing of the peoples. Who will kill You?
 For even Your death is the Word of life
 for humans, And even if You mount
 a cross, You are the Paschal Lamb!
- 18 "Since You, O mountain, are greater than the one who bore You,
 I shall sit down and be quiet. Be a harbor for me,
 and I shall take refuge in You. Great nature

458. If the verb is taken as Pael, this would read "for one who wipes [it] away." Perhaps it is a reference to an early version of the Veronica legend or to the ἀχειροποίητος of Edessa. Cf. Acta Thaddaei 3; E. von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur Christlichen Legende*, TU, ser. 2, III (Leipzig, 1899); more recently, Averil Cameron, "The Sceptic and the Shroud," Inaugural Lecture, Departments of Classics and History, King's College (London, 29 April 1980); Wilkinson, *Pilgrims*, 84, 88, 98, 167b.

459. Mark 5.25–34 et par.; cf. Eusebius EH 7.18–672, for reference to a fourth century pilgrimage site at Panais in Palestine with a statue thought to represent the woman. This woman is later called Veronica, and her story becomes confused with the Veronica of the later Latin legend; further, cf. Wilkinson, *Pilgrims*, 167b.

460. John 9.6.

461. In this strophe Ephrem puts into Mary's mouth an attestation of the excesses of pilgrims. The parallel reference to the Eucharist probably indicates his observations should not be taken as criticisms of pious gullibility.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

that cannot be interpreted, permit Your mother
to be silent about You, for her mouth is weary.

- 19 "Withhold Your gift from Your lyre
that it may rest a little. Since You have taught me
everything I have said, teach me
how to be silent. Since you have wearied me,
let me rest. Glory be to Your Father!"

20

Unfortunately this hymn is only partially preserved. The hymn is a Christian midrash on the story of Abraham and Sarah, with the emphasis on Sarah. As in the case of other women of the Old Testament in the ninth nativity hymn, Ephrem explains the behavior of Sarah as if she were motivated by the expectation of the Messiah. She was jealous of Hagar and she pretended to be Abraham's sister not for any personal reasons but because she knew the Messiah would come through the line of Abraham and herself (str. 1,4). Ephrem argues further that Abraham has only one blessed seed (str. 2–3). The implication seems to be that the one seed is Christ rather than “a multitude of blessed seeds,” namely, the people of Israel.

20

- 1 Because of You Sarah was jealous,⁴⁶²
which [was] not her custom. She was not jealous
of the boy's mother, where even chaste women
are jealous; she was jealous of the slave
because of You, O Free-born Son!

Refrain: From the House of Sarah⁴⁶³ and from the peoples to You be glory!

- 2 For the sake of Your manifestation Isaac prayed
on behalf of his wife;⁴⁶⁴ at once she conceived
the wolf and the lamb. It showed that Abraham

462. Gen. 16.1–16, esp. 16.5.

463. Note the use of the “House of Sarah” rather than “House of Abraham.” Ephrem's purpose is less to emphasize Sarah's importance vis-à-vis Abraham than to emphasize the uniqueness of the blessed progeny of Abraham; the line through Hagar is not included. Yet the effect is to raise Sarah to greater prominence.

464. Rebekah. Gen. 25.19–27.45; esp. Gen. 25.21.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

did not have blessed seeds:

Only one is his seed that blesses all.⁴⁶⁵

- 3 If Abraham has a multitude
of blessed seeds—behold Esau
and Ishmael are first-born sons
of the House of Abraham. By two cursed [men]
[scripture] showed that the blessed seed is one.
- 4 Son of the King, Sarah loved You,
but she hated the king,⁴⁶⁶ nor was the palace
pleasing to her when she walked about
with the exile.⁴⁶⁷ She was inclined to him
for she saw Your manifestation hidden in him.
- 5 Ninety years⁴⁶⁸ were not too wearisome for her
to wait for You. You came in the ninety[eth year]
to Sarah. And you came in the hundred[th year]
to Abraham. You gave . . .

. . .

465. Gal. 3.16.

466. Gen. 12.10–20.

467. Abraham. In his Commentary on Genesis and Exodus, Ephrem explains that even if he spoke from a human perspective in asking Sarah to pretend to be his sister, two purposes were filled: 1) to teach Sarah that she, rather than he, was sterile (!), 2) to show “her love for her husband that she did not exchange the exile for the king.” In this she is a type for her descendants since “just as she did not love the kingdom of Egypt, they would not love the idols and garlic and onions of Egypt. And as all the house of Pharaoh was smitten to free her, so all Egypt was smitten to free her children.” Tonneau, *Gen/Exod*, CSCO 152 (scr. syr. 71) 67.17–31.

468. Gen. 17.17.

21

This hymn begins with a comparison of the reward of the singer at Herod's birthday feast with the singer at the birthday of Christ (str. 1). One who sings and keeps vigil on the eve of the Nativity becomes like the angels (str. 2–4). The song to be sung is one of praise and thanksgiving for the paradox of the incarnation: the Incomprehensible and Unlimited One was confined to the womb of Mary (str. 6–8); the All-powerful One became the abused servant of his servants (str. 13–15). This recurrent theme is given several new expressions in this hymn: First, Divinity is portrayed weaving a garment for herself—the body of Christ (str. 5). Second, God responded to the human penchant for idolatry, the worship of creatures, by the incarnation—the best example of the gentleness of God (str. 9). Third, God is able to reverse the usual order both in nature and in history: The barrenness of a married woman (Elizabeth) and the conception of a virgin (Mary) are symbolic of the rejection of the Jewish people and acceptance of the Gentiles (str. 16–18).

21

Change of melody

- 1 About the birth of the First-born on His feastday let us speak.
 On His day He gave hidden helps.
 If the unclean one on his feast and in commemoration of his day
 gave a gift of anger, a head upon a platter,⁴⁶⁹
 how much [more] will the Blessed One give blessings to one
 who sings on His feast.

469. Mark 6.14–29 et par. For a longer comparison with Herod's birthday, cf. Nat. 4.60–83.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Refrain: Blessed is He Who became small without limit to make us great without limit.

- 2 Let us not count our vigil as everyday vigils;
it is a feastday whose wage increases a hundredfold.
For it is ■ feast that attacks sleep with its vigil,
a speaker who attacks sleep with his voice.
He snatches all good things; he is head of the hosts of the feasts.
and of all joys.
- 3 Today the angels and even the archangels
came down to sing a new song of praise on earth.
by this mystery they come down and rejoice with vigils.
At that time when they sang praise, blasphemy filled [the earth].
Blessed is the birth on which a generation thundered
with hallelujahs of praise.
- 4 For [this] is the night that mingles heavenly Watchers with vigilants.
The Watcher came to make watchers in creation.
Behold vigilants have been made partakers with the Watchers.⁴⁷⁰
Praisegivers have been made companions with the Seraphim.
Blessed is he who became a lyre for Your praise,
and whose wage was Your mercy.
- 5 But let us sing the birth of the First-born—how
Divinity in the womb wove herself a garment.⁴⁷¹
She put it on and emerged in birth; in death she stripped it off
again.
Once she stripped it off; twice she put it on.
When the left hand snatched it, she wrested it from her,
and she placed it on the right hand.⁴⁷²
- 6 The Power that governs all dwelt in a small womb.
While dwelling there, He was holding the reins of the universe.
His Parent was ready for His will to be fulfilled.

470. Christ is the Watcher who by his incarnation makes it possible for humans to participate in the angelic service of praise, that is, to make them "watchers in creation." On watchfulness, cf. Nat. 1.61, 4.195, 6.22–23, 7.9, 21.4.

471. The feminine pronouns refer to "Divinity," which is grammatically feminine in Syriac; since weaving is ■ feminine task in antiquity, it is appropriate to preserve the feminine rather than shifting to a neuter or masculine. On the imagery of the body as a garment, cf. Nat. 4.187–88, 5.4.4–5, 16.11–13, 17.4.

472. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ are meant.

HYMN 21

The heavens and all the creation were filled by Him.
The Sun entered the womb, and in the height and depth
His rays were dwelling.

- 7 He dwelt in the vast wombs of all creation.
They were too small to contain the greatness of the First-born.
How indeed did that small womb of Mary suffice for Him?
It is a wonder if . . . sufficed for Him.
Of all the wombs that contained Him, one womb sufficed:
[the womb] of the Great One Who begot Him.

- 8 The womb that contain Him, if it contained all of Him,
is equal to the wonderful womb that is greater than [the womb] of
His birth.

But who will dare to say that a small womb,
weak and despised, is equal to [the womb] of the Great Being?
He dwelt [there] because of His compassion and since His nature is
great,

He was not limited in anything.

- 9 Reconciling Peace, sent to the peoples,
Gladdening Flash, Who came to the gloomy,
Powerful Leaven, conquering all in silence
Patient One, Who has captured the creation little by little.
Blessed is he who makes Your joys dwell in His heart
and forgets his griefs in You.
- 10 The mouth[s] of the Watchers and vigilants shouted a joyful "peace."
The good news brought by the Watchers⁴⁷³ met the vigilants.
Who will go to sleep on that night that awakened creation?
For they brought a "peace" where enmity had been
Blessed is the Babe who rules with His silence the Majesty
That the speech-endowed had angered.
- 11 The Watchers mingled with watchers; they rejoiced that the world
revived.
Put to shame was the Evil One who became king and plaited a
diadem of deceit.

Like God, he set his throne on the inhabited earth.
The Babe in a manger⁴⁷⁴ cast him from his power.

473. Literally, "The good news of the Watchers, she brought it."

474. Literally, "The Babe Who was put in a manger."

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

The sun returned worship; by his Magi he honored Him.
In his worshippers he worshipped Him.

- 12 God had seen that we worshipped creatures.

He put on a created body to catch us by our habit.⁴⁷⁵

Behold by this fashioned one our Fashioner healed us,
and by this creature our Creator revived us.

His force did not govern us. Blessed is He Who came in what is
ours

and mingled us into what is His.⁴⁷⁶

- 13 O [You] Greater than measure Who became immeasurably small,
from glorious splendor⁴⁷⁷ You humbled Yourself to ignominy.

Your indwelling mercy inclined You to all this.

Let Your compassion incline me to become praiseworthy in my
evil.⁴⁷⁸

Blessed be the one who became a source of melodies
and entirely gave thanks to all of you.

- 14 He became a servant on earth; He was Lord on high.

Inheritor of the height and depth, Who became a stranger.

But the One Who was judged wrongly will judge in truth,
and He in Whose face they spat, breathed the spirit into the face.⁴⁷⁹

He Who held a weak reed was the sceptre for the world
that grows old and leans on Him.

- 15 He Who stood [and] served His servants, sitting, will be
worshipped.

He Whom the Scribes scorned—the Seraphim sang “holy” before
Him.

This glory Adam wanted to steal secretly.

The serpent who cast him down saw to what height [Adam] was
raised.

475. Ephrem plays on the similarity of sounds in *dl'byd'* and *db'dn* in this and the previous line.

476. In the incarnation God came in the flesh or in human nature and thereby mingled us into his divine nature; this is a favorite idea of Ephrem's; cf. Nat. 8.2, Virg 37.2.

477. The Syriac is more redundant or alliterative—"glorious glory" or "splendid splendor."

478. The sense seems to be "despite my evil," but the Syriac does not express this unambiguously.

479. That is, Christ in His divine role as Creator breathed life into Adam, cf. Gen. 2.7. For Ephrem, the breathing of the soul into Adam is the source of the *imago dei* in human beings; hence, it plays an important role in his theology; cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 57–67. On the role of Christ in the creation of the world and especially of Adam, cf. *ibid.* 39–43, 46–51.

HYMN 21

- He crushed him because he harmed him; Eve's feet trampled him
 who had poured gall in her ears.
- 16 The wife became barren and failed to produce fruits,
 but Mary's womb conceived chastely.
 To marvel at fields and to wonder at plantings!
 This one refused to take, and without a loan, she paid back!
 Nature confesses he was conquered, the womb deceived him!
 And without his giving to her, she repaid him.
- 17 By Elizabeth Mary was judged innocent.
 Barrenness petitioned so that the Will that was able
 would close the open gate [and] open the closed one.
 He deprived the married womb; He made fruitful the virgin womb.
 since the People was unfaithful, He obstructed the wife
 before the pure one.⁴⁸⁰
- 18 The One Who is able to moisten barren and dead breasts,
 deprived them when they were young, made them flow when old.
 He forced and changed nature in its time and not in its time.
 The Lord of natures changed the nature of the virgin.
 Since the people was barren he made the old woman
 a mouth on behalf of the young woman.
- 19 And as He began in birth, He continued and completed in death.
 His birth received worship; His death repaid the debt.
 As He came to birth, the magi worshipped Him.
 Again, He came to suffering and the thief took refuge in Him.
 Between His birth and death He placed the world in the middle;
 By [His] birth and death He revived it.⁴⁸¹
- 20 A thousand thousands stood; ten thousand ten thousands ran.

480. Ephrem's intent here is not only to contrast the initial barrenness of Elizabeth despite her married state with the conception of Mary despite her unmarried state. In the following strophe he emphasizes the overturning of nature in both cases and, thence, the sense in which Elizabeth vindicates Mary. Just as God overturned nature to make Elizabeth barren in her youth yet fruitful in her old age, God reversed the natural order by having Mary conceive while ■ virgin.

481. The last six strophes are culled from Hymns 4 and 7 on Faith. (20–22 = HdF 4.1–3; 23 = HdF 4.7; 24 = HdF 4.11; 25 = HdF 7.5). They have the same melody, and the subject is basically compatible, but the addition seems to be the work of a later hand. The emphasis on avoiding investigation, so typical of Ephrem's anti-Arian writings seems most germane to the Hymns on Faith. A more technical reason for preferring the Hymns on Faith as the original context is the change of addressee from the member of the congregation to the Son of God and back again in the added strophes. For this reason the additional strophes have not been included in the prefatory discussion of the hymn.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- Thousands and ten thousands were not able to investigate the One.
All of them in silence, therefore, stood to serve Him.
He has no consort except the Child that is from Him.
Seeking Him is in silence. When Watchers went to investigate,
they reached silence and were restrained.
- 21 The First-born entered the womb, but the pure one perceived not.
He arose and emerged with birthpangs, and the fair one felt Him.
Glorious and hidden His entry; despised and visible His emergence,
since He is God at His entry, but human at His emergence.
[What] a wonder and confusion to hear: Fire entered the womb,
put on a body and emerged!
- 22 Gabriel—that head of the angels—called Him Lord.
He called Him Lord to teach that He is his Lord and not his equal.
For Gabriel, Michael is the equal.
The Son is Lord of the servants. His nature is as great as His name.
A servant is not able to investigate Him since, however much the
servant becomes greater,
the One Whose servant [he is] is greater than him.
- 23 When the Watchers stand before You in [their] glories,
they do not know on what side they should look for You.
They sought You above on high; they saw You below in the depth.
They sought You in heaven; they saw You in the abyss.
They considered You as divine; they found You in the creation.
They came down to You and sang praise.
- 24 You are utterly a wonder. In every side that we seek You,
You are near and far, but who is it that reaches You?
Investigation is not able to stretch it[self] to reach You.
Whenever it stretches out to reach [You], it is cut off and falls short.
It is too short for Your mountain. Faith reaches [You]—
and love and prayer.
- 25 The Magi, too, sought Him, and when they found Him in the crib,
worship instead of investigation they offered Him in silence.
Instead of empty controversies, they gave Him offerings.
You, too, seek the First-born, and if you find Him on high,
instead of confused searchings, open your treasures before Him
and offer Him your deeds.

22

This hymn is an alphabetical acrostic comprised of one to five strophes for each of the twenty-two letters of the Syriac alphabet. The main theme is the need to know the disease in order to appreciate the healer (str. 1–3). In the case of the coming of Christ the disease is idolatry and healing is the freedom from idolatry not only for the worshipper but especially for the creature wrongly worshipped (str. 4–5, 7, 9, 35–36). The sun, moon, fire, material possessions and graven images are prominent among the creatures that have been worshipped through the devices of error and Satan (str. 10–18). But the wisdom and mercy of God led God to turn the human proclivity for idolatry to our own good by the incarnation, “to draw us by a created body toward the Creator” (str. 16, 18).

God released the creation from idolatry in stages: The prophets were sent to the Jewish people; the apostles to the Gentiles (str. 21). The incarnation itself took place in stages: first the conception, then the birth (str. 20, cf. str. 6, 36–37). The gold, frankincense and myrrh brought by the Magi represent the release of these created things from inappropriate human use (str. 26–29). The ancient semitic cults of the high places as well as Chaldean astrology are ended (str. 30–32). Humanity is transformed by the incarnation, resurrection and ascension (str. 35, 38–40). The hymn ends with an invocation of the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth (str. 40–41).

22

Change of melody

- ’1 O peoples sing praise on the feast, the First-born of all feasts!
Recount the sufferings that took place and the bruises and pains
so we may know what ■ wound was healed by the Child Who was
sent.

Blessed is He Who was sufficient for our pains!

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Refrain: Most blessed of all is He by His birth! (Repeat)

- 2 Confess, O redeemed peoples, the Savior of all at His birth!
Even my weak tongue has become a lyre by mercy
to sing the triumphs of the Firstborn on His feastday.
Blessed is He who made us worthy of His feast.
- 3 How indeed can one marvel at a healer
unless one hears and learns what the pains were?
When our wound has been proclaimed, then our Healer is
magnified.
Blessed is He who triumphed over our pains!
- B4 Creatures were worshipped since the worshipper was foolish.
He worshipped everything so that the One they did not worship
came down [and] compassion broke the yoke that enslaved the
universe.
Blessed is He Who released our yoke!
- G5 The mercy of the High One was revealed, and He came down to
free His creation
In this blessed month in which manumission takes place,⁴⁸²
the Lord came to slavery to call the slaves to freedom.
Blessed is He Who brought manumission!
- G6 The Lord of the months chose two months for his actions:
His conception took place in April⁴⁸³ and His birth in January.⁴⁸⁴
In April he sanctified those conceived, and those born He freed in
January.
Blessed is He Who gladdens with His months!
- G7 The sun bellowed out in silence to the Lord against his
worshippers.

482. Ephrem seems to refer to a particular time when manumission of slaves took place, perhaps on some festival. Beck's suggestion of Yom Kippur, cf. Lev. 25.9f., does not seem correct since Ephrem should be referring to January, the date of the nativity celebration. In the Roman Empire manumission of slaves was the prerogative of the owner at any time by prescribed legal procedures; cf. Westermann, *Slave Systems*, 154f. et passim. Constantinian edicts of 316 and 323 C.E. associated this prerogative particularly with the church, the *manumissio in ecclesia*, but I have not found any reference to manumission on a particular date in either the pagan or Christian Roman Empire; ibid. E. J. Jonkers, "De l'influence du Christianisme sur la législation relative à l'esclavage dans l'antiquité," *Mnemosyne*, ser. 3, 1(1933-34), 241-80, esp. 265.

483. Nisan.

484. Conun.

HYMN 22

It was a suffering for him, the servant, that instead of his Lord he
was worshipped.

Behold the creation is joyful that the Creator is worshipped!
Blessed is the worshipful Child!

G8 Three months plaited [a crown] and with victories they crowned
Him.

The blessed [month] served His birth, the desirable His
resurrection,

the joyful His ascension. The months carried His crowns.
Blessed is the One Who triumphed in His months!

G9 Unveil, make joyful your face, O Creation, on our feast!
Sing, O Church, with a voice! Heaven and earth [sing] in silence!
Sing and confess the Child Who brought manumission for all.
Blessed is He Who cut to pieces the letters of bondage!⁴⁸⁵

D10 Since fools honored the sun, they diminished him in his honor.
Now that they know he is ■ servant, by his course he worships his
Lord.

All the servants are glad to be counted servants.
Blessed is He Who set the natures in order!

H11 We have done perverse things that we should be servants to
servants!

Behold, our freedom forced our Lord to be ■ servant to us.
The sun, servant for all, we have made lord for all.
Blessed is He Who has restored us to Him!

W12 Even the moon that had been worshipped was freed by His birth.
For it is a wonder that by the light that enlightens eyes,
eyes were darkened so that they looked upon it as a god.
Blessed is the Flash that enlightened us!

Z13 Fire approved of Your birth to drive worship away by it.
The Magi used to worship [fire]—they worshipped You!
They left it and worshipped its Lord; Fire they exchanged for fire.
Blessed is He Who baptized us in His light!

H14 Instead of the foolish fire that eats its own body itself,
the Magi worshipped the Fire Who gave His body to those who
eat.

485. Cf. Col. 2.14.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

The coal drew near to sanctify unclean lips.⁴⁸⁶

Blessed is He Who has mixed His fire with us!

T15 Error blinded humankind that we should worship creatures.
Fellow-servants were worshipped, and the Lord of the universe was
denied.

The Worshipful came down to birth and gathered worship to
Himself.

Blessed is He Who is worshipped by all!

Y16 The All-Knowing saw that we worshipped creatures.

He put on a created body to catch us by our habit,
to draw us by a created body toward the Creator.

Blessed is He Who contrived to draw us [to Him].

Y17 The evil one knew [how] to harm us; with the luminaries he
blinded us.

With possessions he maimed us, by gold he made us poor.

With graven images he made us a heart of stone.⁴⁸⁷

Blessed is He who came to soften it!

K18 They carved stones and set them up that humankind might stumble
on them.

They did not put them on the road that the blind should stumble
on them.

They named them gods that on them the seeing might stumble.

Blessed is He Who unmasks false gods!

K19 Sin spread its wings to cover everything
so that no one could see the truth from above it.

Truth came down to the womb, emerged [and] rolled away error.

Blessed is He Who dispelled [sin] by His birth!

L20 For the Compassionate One did not endure seeing the way closed.

Coming down in the conception, He opened the way a little.

Emerging in birth, He trod it out and set His milestones on it.

Blessed is the peace of Your way!

L21 He chose the prophets; they made smooth the way for the People.

He sent the apostles; they cleared a path for the peoples.

The snares of the evil one were put to shame since the weak
cleared them away.

486. Isa. 6.5-7.

487. Cf. Ezek. 11.19f.

HYMN 22

- Blessed is He Who made straight our paths!
M22 Graven images were blinding their carvers in secret.
They carved an eye in stone, but they blinded the eyes of the
soul.⁴⁸⁸
Praise be to Your birth that opened [the eyes of] blind seers.
Blessed [is He] Who restored sight!
N23 Let chaste women praise that pure Mary.
Since in their mother Eve their disgrace was great,
behold in Mary their sister their triumph was magnified.
Blessed is He Who shone forth from them!
N24 Let the peoples praise Your birth when they acquired eyes to see.
When He shook off their wine and they saw the humiliation of
their soul,⁴⁸⁹
they were judges for them[selves], and they worship their
Deliverer.
Blessed is He Who taught remorse!
S25 His worship humanity has scattered everywhere.
You did not seek the worshipful one to offer Him worship.
But the worshipped did not tolerate [being worshipped] by errant
worshippers.
Blessed is He Who came down to be worshipped!
S26 The gold of images [of gods] worshipped You Who drew it out for
alms.
What was devoid of use in dead [images] [was] for the use of the
living.
It ran to Your moneybox as it ran to Your manger.
Blessed is He Whom the creation loved!
S27 Frankincense that [had] served demons worshipped Your birth.
It was gloomy in its vapor; it rejoiced to see its Lord.
Instead of the incense of error, [Your birth] was offered to God.
Blessed is Your birth that is worshipped!
S28 Myrrh worshipped You on its own behalf and for similar sweet
spices.
Loathsome graven images had made it loathsome since they had
anointed its ointments.

488. Or "of the self," i.e., "their own eyes."

489. Or "their own humiliation."

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

By You the sweet spices smelled sweet in the oil with which Mary
anointed You.⁴⁹⁰

Blessed is Your scent that made us smell sweet!

S29 Gold, that had been worshipped, worshipped You as the Magi
approached.

What was worshipped in molten [images] gave You worship.

With its worshippers it worshipped You; it confessed that You are
worshipful.

Blessed is the One Who demanded His worship!

30 The evil one who had exulted in the inhabited earth fled with his
hosts.

At the high place they sacrificed a calf to him; in the gardens they
killed bulls for him.

He swallowed the entire creation; the prey filled his belly.

Blessed is He Who came and annihilated him!

31 About him our Lord said that he would fall from heaven,⁴⁹¹
that the loathsome one would magnify himself [and] would fall
from his greatness.

The foot of Mary has trampled him, who was bruised by Eve on
his heel.⁴⁹²

Blessed is He Who by His birth humbled him!

P32 The Chaldeans were wandering everywhere and they went astray.
They were confused in the inhabited earth, the announcers of
error.

They were silenced and conquered by the announcers of truth.

Blessed is the birth that was announced!

P33 Sin has spread her nets for the catch.⁴⁹³

Praise to Your birth that ripped up the nets of error.

The soul that had been captured in the depth flew out to the
height.

Blessed is He Who acquired wings for us!

§34 His will would also have been able to set us free by force.

490. John 12.1–8, esp. v.3.

491. Luke 10.18.

492. Gen. 3.15.

493. Ephrem plays on *šwd*, “capture,” and its derivatives, “nets” and “catch” throughout this strophe.

HYMN 22

Since it was not by force we were guilty, He did not grant us
victory by force.

The evil one by guile enslaved us; Your birth beguiled him to
revive us.

Blessed is He Who schemed to revive us!

Q35 Creatures complained that they were worshipped; in silence they
sought manumission.

He Who frees all heard, and since He [could] not tolerate [this], He
came down.

He put on the servant in the womb, emerged [and] freed the
creation.

Blessed is He Who made profits for His creation!

R36 Mercy on high was greatly moved by the voice of creatures that
appealed for help.

Gabriel was sent; he came to announce Your conception.⁴⁹⁴

When You arrived at birth, the Watchers announced Your
emergence.⁴⁹⁵

Most blessed of all is Your worship!

R37 For greater is the joy of the birth than the conception.

Indeed one angel announced to us Your conception;
the joy of Your birth throngs of Watchers announced.

Blessed is Your announcement on Your day!

S38 I, too, will offer You glory on Your day, Worshipful One.

Take from the fruit I have, and give me the compassion You have.

If I give [from] the evil that is mine, how much more will You give
Who are good.

Blessed is Your wealth in Your servant!

T39 The two things You⁴⁹⁶ asked, we have by Your birth.

You put on our visible body; let us put on your hidden power.

Our body became Your garment; Your spirit became our robe.

Blessed is He Who was adorned and adorned us!

T40 The depth and height wondered that Your birth subdued the
rebels.

494. Luke 1.26–38.

495. Luke 2.13f.

496. Cf. John 17. Beck reads “we” with one ms., but this seems to be an allusion to Jesus’ requests on behalf of the believing community in the farewell discourse.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Since we gave You hostages, You gave us the Paraclete.⁴⁹⁷
When the hostages ascended from us, great power came down to
us.

Blessed is He Who took and sent!

T41 Come all you mouths, pour out and become a type
of water and wells of voices; let the Spirit of truth come!
Let Her sing praise in all of us to the Father Who redeemed us by
His Child.
Most blessed of all is His birth!

497. Cf. John 15.26, 16.7. The "hostages" are the body and soul[?] or spirit[?] of Christ. Beck has noted the similar notion in Aphrahat, cf. Dem. 21.18 and 23.50 (Parisot II, 98.24–26). In the first case, within an extended comparison of Jesus with Daniel, he says, "Daniel was taken with the hostages for the sake of his people, and the body of Jesus was a hostage for the sake of all peoples." In the second instance, in the context of a discussion of the general resurrection in which he alludes to John 14.3 and 20, Aphrahat says, "Therefore let us rejoice in the hostage who was led from us and sits in glory with the Glorious King." Both citations in Aphrahat have "hostage" in the singular, whereas the passage in Ephrem has the plural. Beck translates in the singular without comment. The reason for Ephrem's use of the plural may lie in his application of theological anthropology to the resurrection of Jesus; that is, he envisages the body, soul and spirit of Jesus as hostages. For Ephrem's anthropology, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 45–66, esp. 58; n. 33. For an interesting parallel, cf. Origen, dial. c. Her. 138.

23

This hymn plays on a familiar theme, the paradox of the incarnation. As always, however, Ephrem gives the theme a new flavor. The miracle of the incarnation is not only that the magnificently transcendent God should become a small child (str. 1, 8), but also that the Logos indwelling the entire creation should confine himself to a tiny part of it (str. 2, 11). Always stressing the power and majesty of Christ (str. 3, 4, 12), Ephrem asks why he should choose the path of *kenosis*. The answer is threefold: the grace of God (str. 3), the gift of hope for humankind (str. 6), the return of life to Adam and to us all (str. 5, 13, 14). The liturgical celebration brings us close to the moment of the birth of Christ, so that we, like the Magi, can come from afar to experience the incarnation through our faith (str. 7, 9, 10).

23

Change of melody

Refrain: Glory to You utterly from all of us. (Repeat).

- 1 Who, being a mortal, can tell about the Reviver of all,
Who left the height of His majesty and came down to smallness?
You, Who magnify all be being born, magnify my weak mind
that I may tell about Your birth, not to investigate Your majesty,⁴⁹⁸
but to proclaim Your grace. Blessed is He Who is [both] hidden and
revealed in His actions!
- 2 It is a great wonder that the Son, Who dwelt entirely in a body,
inhabited it entirely, and it sufficed for Him. Although limitless, he
dwelt in it.

498. Throughout his anti-Arian polemics Ephrem insists that they erroneously believe they can investigate God's nature.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

His will was entirely in Him; His totality was not in Him.
Who is sufficient to say that although He dwelt entirely in the body,
still He dwelt entirely in the universe? Blessed is the Unlimited
Who was limited!

- 3 Your majesty is hidden from us; Your grace is revealed before us.
I will be silent, my Lord, about your majesty, but I will speak about
Your grace.

Your grace seized hold of You and inclined You toward our evil.
Your grace made You a Babe; Your grace made You a human being.
Your majesty contracted [and] stretched out. Blessed is the power
that became small and became great!

- 4 Glory to Him Who became earthly although heavenly by His
nature!

By His love he became first-born to Mary although He is First-born
of Divinity.

He became in name the child of Joseph although He is Child of the
Heavenly One.

He became by His will a human although He is God by His nature.
Glorious is Your will and Your nature! Blessed is Your glory that
put on our image!

- 5 My Lord, Your birth became mother of all creatures,
since, again, she labored and gave birth to humanity which gave
birth to You.

[Humanity] gave birth to You physically; You begot her spiritually.
Your birth became Begetter of all. Blessed is He Who became young
and restored youth to all!

- 6 Since human hope was shattered, hope was increased by Your birth.
The heavenly beings announced good hope to human beings.
Satan, who cut off our hope, cut off his hope by his [own] hands
when he saw that hope increased. Your birth became for the
hopeless

a spring gushing hope. Blessed is the hope that brought the Gospel!

- 7 Your birthday resembles You, being, like You, desirable and lovable.
Without having seen Your birth, we love it as if in its time.
On Your day we see You just as when You were a babe,
beloved of everyone. Behold the churches rejoice in it.
Your day adorns and is adorned. Blessed is the day that came to be
for our sake.

HYMN 23

- 8 Your day gave us a gift like which the Father has no other.
 It was not the Seraphim He sent us, nor the Cherubim came down
 to us.
 Nor did attending Watchers come, but the First-born Who is
 attended.
 Who is able⁴⁹⁹ to give thanks that Majesty without measure
 is lying in a despised manger? Blessed is He Who gave us all that
 He gained!
- 9 Your birth made that generation glad, and Your day makes our
 generation glad.
 Double is the bliss of that generation who saw the birth and the day.
 Small[er] is the bliss of the later people who see only the day of
 your birth.
 But since the nearer people doubted, greater is the bliss of the
 later people who believed in You without seeing You. Blessed is
 Your bliss that was increased for us!
- 10 The Magi rejoiced from afar; the scribes proclaimed from nearby.
 The prophet showed his erudition, and also Herod his fury.
 The scribes showed interpretations; the Magi showed offerings.
 It is a wonder that to one babe the kinspeople rushed with their
 swords,⁵⁰⁰
 but strangers with their offerings.⁵⁰¹ Blessed is Your birth that
 stirred up the universe!
- 11 Mary's lap astonishes me that it sufficed for You, my Lord, and
 embraced You.
 The entire creation was [too] small to hide Your majesty.
 Earth and heaven were [too] narrow to be like laps
 to hide Your divinity. [Too] small for You is the earth's lap,
 but large [enough] for You is Mary's lap. He dwelt in a lap, and He
 healed by the hem [of His garment].⁵⁰²
- 12 He [was] wrapped [in] swaddling clothes in baseness, but they
 offered Him gifts.⁵⁰³

499. The Syriac adds "to be sufficient."

500. Matt. 2.16–18.

501. Matt. 2.9–11.

502. The same word *knp'* means "lap, bosom, arms" and "border, flap, hem of a garment;"
 Margoliouth 218b. Cf. Matt. 9.20–22, Luke 8.43–48.

503. Luke 2.7.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

He put on the garments of youth, and helps emerged from them.
He put on the water of baptism, and rays flashed out from it.⁵⁰⁴
He put on linen garments in death,⁵⁰⁵ and triumphs were shown by them.

With His humiliations [came] His exaltations. Blessed is He Who joins His glory to His suffering!

- 13 All these are changes that the Compassionate One shed and put on when He contrived to put on Adam the glory that he had shed. He wrapped swaddling clothes with his leaves and put on garments instead of his skins.⁵⁰⁶

He was baptized for [Adam's] wrongdoing and embalmed for his death.

He rose and raised him up in glory. Blessed is He Who came down, put on [a body] and ascended!

- 14 Since Your birth sufficed for the sons of Adam as [for] Adam, O Great One Who became a babe, by Your birth again You begot me.

O Pure One Who was baptized, let Your washing wash us of impurity.

O Living One Who was embalmed, let us obtain life by Your death.

I will thank You entirely in Him Who fills all. Glory to You entirely from all of us!

504. Cf. Mark 1.9–11 et par. None of the evangelists speaks of rays flashing from the water, but Ephrem refers presumably to the presence of the Holy Spirit.

505. Mark 15.46 et par.

506. Gen. 3.7.

This hymn is an extended comment on the second chapter of Matthew's gospel, the visit of the Magi, the flight into Egypt and the slaughter of the innocents. In his handling of these materials Ephrem's midrashic style shows ■ remarkable consonance with Matthew's.⁵⁰⁷ For example, he clearly understands Matthew's intent to evoke the Exodus (str. 3). More remarkable, however, is his perception that Balaam is the principal model for the Magi.⁵⁰⁸ Ephrem cites the prophecy of Balaam early in the hymn (str. 4.1), and he refers to it again explicitly near the end in a strophe that recapitulates the major themes of the hymn (str. 20). Throughout the hymn his emphasis is on the star as a sort of prophet that discriminates between good and evil listeners (str. 5-8, 13). Closely linked is the theme of the futility of the opposition of the tyrannical king to the plan of God (str. 8, 9). He also stresses the irony of a Babylonian seer who prophesies for Israel (str. 4, 13, 15). He uses an unusually rich and varied range of imagery to describe the persecution and slaughter of the innocents, notably, the chase of animals of prey (str. 3, 6), and destruction of a garden (str. 7, 17-18). In the latter passages he skillfully blends in eucharistic images as well.

As is often the case, he chooses to emphasize the anti-Judaic direction of the Matthean story (esp. str. 11). He uses the Magi as representatives of the Gentiles and contrasts their belief with the unbelief and hostility of Herod and his soldiers, whom he takes as typifying the Jewish people (str. 4; cf. Nat. 23.10). With the advent of Jesus, Israel's line of priests, prophets and kings has come to an end (str. 2). In a sense the line of prophecy has crossed over from the prophets of Israel to the Magi and the star as a consequence of the deafness and blindness of Israel (str. 12-16, 19-20).

After the insertion of a personal prayer (str. 21), several manuscripts

507. On the infancy narratives as *midrashim*, cf. Brown, *Messiah*, 557-63.

508. For the story of Balaam, cf. Num. 22-24. For this as the background of the story of the Magi, cf. Brown, *Messiah*, 190-96.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

continue with four additional strophes (str. 22–25), which fit very well with the rest of the hymn, continuing the anti-Judaic theme and relating the theme of the star to John the Baptist. Like the star John proclaimed Christ, but unlike the star he proclaimed the same message to all despite the fact that it led to his own death (str. 23–24). The star, on the other hand, hid its message from evil men to delay the death of Christ until the proper time (str. 25, cf. str. 17).

24

Change of melody and [to] the same melody [as . . .]⁵⁰⁹

- 1 The babes were slain because of Your all-reviving birth.⁵¹⁰

But since the King, our Lord the Lord of the kingdom, was a slain
[king],

slain hostages were given by that cunning tyrant.⁵¹¹

The heavenly ranks received, clothed in the mysteries of His
slaying,

the hostages whom earthly beings offered. Blessed is the King Who
magnified them!

Refrain: To You be glory from all mouths on this day of Your birth!

- 2 As keepers of deposits all the kings of the house of David
handed down and passed on the throne and diadem of the Son of
David.

The priests, prophets and kings came to an end; they were confined
and limited to One

Who came, the Lord of everything, and took everything from them.

He ended all successions.⁵¹² Blessed is He Who was clothed in what
belonged to Him.

509. The manuscript tradition is confused as to which is the appropriate melody for this hymn.

510. Matt. 2.16–18. The murdered innocents are types, anticipating the death of Christ.

511. Beck suggests an alteration of the text to make the tyrant the subject, but the same sense may be obtained by taking “that cunning tyrant” as *casus pendens*, the plural verb as a passive, and the pronoun “*lb*” as referring to Herod rather than to Christ and as the agent of the passive verb.

512. Literally, “the successions of everything.”

HYMN 24

- 3 The doves in Bethlehem murmured since the serpent destroyed their
offspring.⁵¹³
The eagle fled to Egypt to go down and receive the promises.⁵¹⁴
Egypt rejoiced to be the capital for repaying her debts.
She who had slain the sons of Joseph⁵¹⁵ labored to repay by the Son
of Joseph
the debts of the sons of Joseph. Blessed is He Who called Him from
Egypt!
- 4 The scribes read every day that a star would shine forth from
Jacob.⁵¹⁶
The People have the voice and the reading; the peoples have the
shining forth and the explanation.
They have the books and we have the deeds; they have the branches
and we their fruits.
The scribes read in books; the Magi saw in actions
the flash of that reading. Blessed is He Who added for us their
books!
- 5 Who is able to speak about the secrets and the revelations
of the star of light that went before the bearers of offerings?
The diadem was revealed and announced; the body was veiled and
hidden.
It became the Son's in two ways: announcer and guardian:
It guarded His body and announced His diadem. Blessed is He
Who makes His announcers wise!
- 6 The tyrant gazed at the Magi who asked, "Where is the king's
son?"⁵¹⁷
Although his heart was gloomy, he sought an appearance of joy.⁵¹⁸
With the sheep he sent wolves to slay the Lamb of God.⁵¹⁹
The Lamb went to Egypt to judge from there those

513. Cf. Matt. 2.17f.

514. Cf. Matt. 2.13f.

515. Cf. Exod. 1.8.

516. Num. 24.17.

517. Matt. 2.2.

518. Literally, "Although his heart was a gloomy one, he sought an appearance of a joyful one." Cf. Matt. 2.3.

519. Here and in the following strophe Ephrem implies that the soldiers accompanied the Magi, but they were sent later according to Matthew, cf. Matt. 2.7–18; however, cf. Num. 22–24, e.g. Num 22.20, where Balaam is accompanied by the elders of Moab and Midian.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

whom he had delivered from there. Blessed is He Who enslaved them again!⁵²⁰

- 7 The Magi declared to the tyrant, "When your servants mingled with us,

the star of light was hidden and the paths were veiled."⁵²¹

The good men did not know that the bitter king [had] sent villains as worshippers to destroy the sweet Fruit

Whom bitter men eat and become sweet. To You be glory, Medicine of life!

- 8 But since the Magi received the command to go and seek Him,⁵²² it is written of them that they saw the star of light and rejoiced.⁵²³ It is known that it was well-hidden since they rejoiced in its sight. It was veiled to hinder the villains; it rose up to summon the worshippers.

It defeated one side and summoned the other. Blessed is the one who triumphed on both sides!

- 9 How did the unclean one who slew the infants overlook the Infant? Justice hindered him who supposed the Magi would return to him.⁵²⁴

While he delayed, he postponed catching the Worshipped and His worshippers,

his hands let everything escape; the offerings and the worshippers fled

from the tyrant to the King's Son. Glory to Him Who knows every contrivance!

- 10 The guileless Magi, asleep on their couches, were thinking so that sleep became a mirror and a dream rose up like light;⁵²⁵ they saw the slayer, his deceit and his sword flashing, and they were terrified.

His deceit reached out to the men; he sharpened the sword for the infants.

520. Probably the measures taken against the Jews by Titus and Hadrian are meant, as Beck suggests.

521. This is not in the canonical account, which has no indication that Herod's men accompanied the Magi.

522. Matt. 2.8.

523. Matt. 2.10.

524. Matt. 2.16.

525. Matt. 2.12; cf. Num. 22.8,13,19f.

HYMN 24

The Watcher taught the sleeping men. Blessed is He Who makes
wise the guileless!

- 11 The simple believers⁵²⁶ recognized two advents of Christ,
but the foolish scribes were not aware of even one advent.
Yet the peoples received life from one and there at the other they
will be revived.

The one advent scattered the People whose understanding was
blind;

The second will blot out its memory.⁵²⁷ Blessed is the King Who has
come and will come!

- 12 The Redeemer shone forth to the blind, but they looked to others.
The Sun showed His rays, but they were clothed in darkness.
The Resplendent One sent His light, and it summoned the sons of
light

to reveal to the sons of darkness, "Behold in your midst is the light,
but over your eyes a veil."⁵²⁸ To You be glory, New Sun!

- 13 The prophets announced His birth but did not specify His time.
He sent the Magi, and they came and declared His time.
But the Magi who made known the time did not specify where the
Infant was.

The glorious star of light ran and showed where the Infant was.⁵²⁹
This glorious succession! Blessed is He who by all of them was
interpreted!

- 14 They⁵³⁰ rejected the trumpet of Isaiah that sounded the pure
conception;⁵³¹

they stilled the lyre of the psalms that sang about his priesthood;⁵³²
they silenced the kithara of the spirit that sang of His kingship.⁵³³

Under a great silence they closed in the great birth that made

526. Literally, "who believed."

527. Like many Patristic writers, Ephrem attributes the Roman dispersal of the Jews to their rejection of Jesus. He extends this to the eschaton, contrary to Paul's view in Rom. 11.25-36.

528. 2 Cor. 3.14. Ephrem's meaning is that the star sent by God summoned the Magi, the sons of light, to reveal Christ to the Jews, the sons of darkness, the blind. The alterations of the text here suggested by Beck are not necessary.

529. Matt. 2.9.

530. I.e., the Jewish people.

531. Isa. 7.14.

532. Ps. 110.4.

533. Ps. 145.10-13.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

heavenly and earthly beings shout out. Blessed is He Who shines
forth from within the stillness!

- 15 His voice became a hidden key, and it opened the mouth of the
Magi.

Since in Judea the announcers were silent, [the Magi] sounded the
voice in creation.

The distant ones came bearing the news they [had] rejected.

The ungrateful⁵³⁴ began to heed the voices of the strangers,
crying out about the Son of David.⁵³⁵ Blessed is He Who silenced
them with our voice!

- 16 Since the People withheld offerings and did not approach the King's
Son,

His ambassador⁵³⁶ went out to the peoples and brought them with
their offering.

But it did not bring all of them since the small womb of Bethlehem
could not suffice for them, so that the womb of the holy church
opened wide and enclosed her children. Blessed is He Who made
fruitful the barren one!

- 17 In Bethlehem the slayers mowed down the fair flowers so that with
them

would perish the fair Seed in which was hidden the Living Bread.⁵³⁷
The Staff of life had fled so that its might come to the sheaf in the
harvest.

The Cluster that fled while young, gave Himself in the trampling
to revive souls with His wine. Glory to You, the Medicine of life!

- 18 The villains entered the garden full of young fruits.

They shook down the blossoms from the branches. Buds and shoots
they destroyed.

Unknowing, the agitator offered pure gifts⁵³⁸—

to him woe, to them grace. Bethlehem brought forth early and gave
virgin fruits to the Holy One. Blessed is He Who received the first
fruits!

534. This is the *nomen agentis* for the word *tlm* translated as "rejected" in the line above.

535. Cf. Num. 22.1–14, 24.17; cf. Nat. 23.10 and Nat. 24.20, below.

536. I.e., the star.

537. Cf. Matt. 2.16ff. and John 6.22–71, esp. 35.

538. I.e., the innocents were gifts offered to God to their benefit and to the deficit of Herod, who offered them.

HYMN 24

- 19 Since the scribes were silent with envy and the Pharisees with
jealousy,
people of stone who acquired a heart of stone cried out and
praised;⁵³⁹
They sang praises before the rejected Stone that became the head.⁵⁴⁰
The stones were softened by the Stone and they acquired speaking
mouths.
Stones cried out by means of the Stone.⁵⁴¹ Blessed is Your birth that
made the stones cry out!
- 20 As is written in the scripture, distant peoples saw the star
that the near People might be put to shame. O the learned and
proud People who by the peoples have been retaught how and
where they saw
that rising of which Balaam spoke!⁵⁴² A stranger declared it;
strangers were those who saw it. Blessed is He Who made His
kinspeople jealous!
- 21 Let my request approach Your gate and my need Your treasury.
Grant me, my Lord, without reckoning, as God [grants] to man
that even should You increase as the Son of the Gracious and add as
a King's Son
[and] should I be ungrateful as one of dust—like Adam is the child
of Adam,
and like the Gracious is the Son of the Gracious. Glory to You, One
like His Father!⁵⁴³
- 22 The People who possessed the scriptures did not perceive that they
proclaimed its faults,
they cried out about its exile, and they told about our entry.⁵⁴⁴

539. Cf. the entry into Jerusalem, Mark 11.1–10 et par.; for hearts of stone, cf. Ezek. 11.19f. and Nat. 22.17.

540. Mark 12.10 et par. On Christ the Stone or Rock, cf. Virg 14.6–7.

541. Luke 19.40.

542. Num. 22–24, esp. Num. 24.17. Just as Balaam was brought from a distance to put to shame the king of Moab and his people, the Magi were brought from afar to put to shame King Herod and his people, cf. str. 15 above.

543. Although the ms. tradition and the meter of this strophe present no problems, the content bears no resemblance to the previous strophes. It appears to be a final invocation intended to end the hymn. This is perhaps the reason for the loss of the following strophes from some of the mss. It is my judgment that str. 22–25 belong to the original hymn.

544. On this anti-Jewish use of the Hebrew scriptures, especially of the prophets, cf. Ruether, *Fratricide*, 124–49.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Behold the fool reads in his scriptures the promises that were distributed to us!

As he boasts in his scriptures, he reads to us his [own] accusation, and he witnesses our inheritance to us! Blessed is He Who wearied them to give us rest.

- 23 The pair of announcers expressed the properties of the Only-Begotten:

the star of light and John—one a shining forth, the other a voice.⁵⁴⁵

For the One Announced was also a Word and a Light.

Voice and ray serve Him. The shining forth announced His light and the voice His wisdom.⁵⁴⁶ More blessed is the First-born than His announcers!

- 24 John gazed at Him and cried, "This is the Lamb of God!"⁵⁴⁷

The Lamb grew fat and matured, and He came to be an offering.

John was not afraid to cry, "Behold, it is He!"⁵⁴⁸—

not even if the slayers attack, even if it was the time of sprinkling⁵⁴⁹ so that forgiveness would be by His blood. Blessed is the

Compensator of our sins.

- 25 The glorious star of light was not like John,

for there was a [place] where it rose and made straight the way for the simple,

but there was [a place] where it sank and made the path of the wolves go astray.

It kept the Lamb from the slaughter so that the day for the slaughter would come,⁵⁵⁰

that in Him the flock would be pardoned. Blessed is He in Whom His possessions were redeemed!

545. Cf. Nat. 6.9.

546. Although Beck's text erroneously (?) gives the plural here, he translates the singular.

547. John 1.29.

548. John 1.30.

549. The Day of Atonement, cf. Lev. 16.1–34. Jesus' death is so interpreted, e.g., in Heb. 9.11–10.18. Here, Ephrem refers to the death of Christ, but he also seems to have John's death in mind as an antetype of Christ's, like the deaths of the innocents in str. 1–3.

550. Cf. str. 17 above.

25

This hymn links the liturgical festivals of the church to the mystery of the incarnation. The first ten strophes, addressed to the church, celebrate the blessings bestowed on it. The festivals and scripture of Judaism have been transferred to Christianity (str. 1 and 9). The festivals of the church have been honored by angels, Magi and good kings (str. 2–4). The prophets Isaiah, Micah and Daniel and King David have honored the church by their predictions about the Messiah (str. 5–8). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus bestowed ten blessings on the church—ten because it is the perfect number (str. 10).

By introducing a notion of cosmic and mysterious significance, the tenth strophe broaches the theme of the latter half of the hymn: the infinitude, incomprehensibility and eternity of the Incarnate One. First Ephrem addresses Bethlehem-Ephrata, the insignificant town where the Infinite One made himself finite, where the Timeless One had a beginning (str. 11–13). Then, similarly, he turns to Mary, the one best able to know the Unknowable One; she was wise enough to know not to inquire but to praise (str. 14–15). Finally, Simeon—perhaps as a figure for all Christian priests—is portrayed offering the Father's Child to the Father (str. 16). Through the incarnation "the earth became . . . a new heaven" in which the angels sing praises—reemphasizing the first theme of Christian festivals of praise and perhaps alluding to the understanding of Christian liturgy as heavenly praise (str. 17).

25

On the melody, "Blessed are you, Ephrata!"

- 1 Blessed are you, O church in whom resounds
the great feast, the festival of the King!

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

Abandoned Sion thirsts⁵⁵¹ for them very much,
but her gates are bereft of festivals.
Blessed are your gates that are opened but not filled
and your courtyards, extensive but not empty.
Within you graze the peoples—behold they cried out
and silenced the People.

Refrain: Glory to the One Who sent Him! (Repeat)

- 2 Blessed are you, O church, upon whose festivals
Watchers rejoice among your feasts.⁵⁵²
For the Watchers praised one night
on the earth that restrains and refuses praise.
Blessed are your voices that have been sown and reaped,
and in heaven they have been gathered into storehouses.
Your mouth is a censer, and your voices like sweet spices
rise up on your festivals!
- 3 Blessed are you, O church, to whom come
all offerings on this feast.
The Magi, once, among deceivers
offered their gifts to Truth.
Blessed is your habitation in which the King's Son,
worshipped with gifts, condescended to dwell.
Gold of the West and spices of the East
are offered on your festivals.
- 4 Blessed are you, O church, who have
no king, no tyrant and harmer of babes.
For in Bethlehem he slew infants indiscriminately
so that the Child who is Reviver of all might die.
Blessed are your children who were emulated and honored
by kings who were seasoned by your worship.⁵⁵³
The crown of the East trampled your loved ones
that he might be trampled by those you love.⁵⁵⁴

551. *zbyn*, ■ pun on *zbywn*, Sion; Ephrem continues with *šdyn*, “are bereft.”

552. There are several similar sounding words here: church (*‘dt*), your festivals (*‘d’dyky*), Watchers (*‘yr*), and your feasts (*‘dyky*).

553. Constantine and his successors.

554. Shapur II, Sassanid ruler of Persia, persecuted Christians in his realm and also carried on extensive military campaigns against the Roman rulers, but the Roman victories were not so decisive as Ephrem here pretends.

HYMN 25

- 5 Blessed are you, O church, in whom rejoices
even Isaiah in his prophecy:
"Behold a virgin will conceive and bring forth
a child" whose name is a great mystery.⁵⁵⁵
O for the explanation that was revealed in the church!
Two names were joined together and became one:
Emmanuel.⁵⁵⁶ El is with you always,⁵⁵⁷
Who joins you with His members.
- 6 Blessed are you, O church, by Micah who cried out
"A shepherd will come out from Ephrata."⁵⁵⁸
For He came to Bethlehem to take
from it the rod of Jesse and to rule the peoples.⁵⁵⁹
Blessed are your lambs sealed with his Seal⁵⁶⁰
and your sheep kept by His word.
You, O church, are the eternal Bethlehem,
since in you is the bread of life.⁵⁶¹
- 7 Blessed are you, O church, in whom behold
even Daniel, the man beloved, rejoices.⁵⁶²
He declared that the glorious Messiah would be slain
and the holy town would be destroyed by His slaying.⁵⁶³
Woe to the People that was rejected and did not repent!
Blessed are the peoples who were called and did not turn away.
Those invited declined and others instead of them
enjoyed their marriage feasts.⁵⁶⁴
- 8 Blessed are you, O church, by whom
David the King sings with his lyre.
By the Spirit he sang about Him, "You are my Son.

555. Isa. 7.14.

556. Strictly speaking Emman and El are not two names for God, but the following lines indicate that this is the division Ephrem means. The two parts are joined by what appears to be the conjunction *w* but is actually the enclitic *bw*. Ephrem's remark is a kind of theological grammarian's pun.

557. In Syriac, as in Hebrew, Emmanuel means "God [El] is with us."

558. Mic. 5.2.

559. Cf. Isa. 11.1–16 and Mic. 5.3–7.

560. Cf. Rev. 7.1–8.

561. Ephrem's meaning is based on a pun in the Syriac, since "Bethlehem" means "house of bread."

562. Dan. 9.23.

563. Dan. 9.26.

564. Luke 14.15–24; cf. Matt. 22.2–10.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- I"—by the glories of holiness—"have begotten You today."⁵⁶⁵
 Blessed are your ears, cleansed to hear
 His day as His body.⁵⁶⁶ Keep vigil and honor Him.
 Be chastened by Sion who made the festival mournful.
 Make joyful Him Who made you joyful.
- 9 Blessed are you, O church, since all festivals
 fled from Sion and alighted with you.
 In you the weary prophets have found rest
 from that labor and shame in Judah.
 Blessed are her scriptures unrolled in your temples
 and her festivals celebrated in your temples.⁵⁶⁷
 Sion is bereft, and behold today the generations shout at your
 festivals.
- 10 Blessed are you, O church, with ten blessings⁵⁶⁸
 that our Lord gave; a perfect mystery.
 For every number depends on ten.⁵⁶⁹
 Therefore ten blessings perfected you.
 Blessed are your crowns into all of which were plaited
 holy blessings mingled in every crown.
 Blessed One, crowned with every blessing,
 bestow a blessing on me too!
- 11 Blessed are you, Ephrata, mother of kings,
 from whom shone forth the Lord⁵⁷⁰ of diadems.
 It was Micah who announced to you, "He is from eternity
 and the length of His times is incomprehensible."⁵⁷¹
 Blessed are your eyes that met Him before all!
 You He found worthy to see Him when He shone forth:
 the Origin of blessing and Beginning of joys.
 You received Him before the universe.
- 12 Blessed are you, Bethlehem, whom fortified towns

565. Ps. 2.7.

566. The meaning is unclear.

567. Two different words *bykl'* and *nws'*—the first of Semitic origin, the second Greek *ναός*—are used here for temple. In this context both refer to the Christian churches.

568. I.e., the first ten strophes of this hymn, but also, as Beck has noted, the beatitudes are counted as ten: Matt. 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.10, 5.11b [with Luke 6.27a], Luke 6.21; cf. Aph. Dem. 2.19.

569. Cf. Nat. 26.12 and 27.2–4.

570. The indication of plural in Beck's text is apparently an error.

571. Cf. Mic. 5.2.

HYMN 25

and fortified cities envied.
 Mary, like you, women envied—
 and virgin daughters of powerful men.
 Blessed is the girl He found worthy to indwell,
 and also the town He found worthy to inhabit.
 A needy girl and a small town
 He chose to humble Himself.

- 13 Blessed are you, Bethlehem, in whom was the beginning
 for the Son, Who is in the Father from eternity.
 It is difficult to comprehend that He is before Time⁵⁷²
 Who in you subjected Himself to Time.
 Blessed are your ears that were first [to hear when] in you bleated
 the Lamb of God Who rejoiced in you.
 In your manger He became small, but He extended in all directions
 and was worshipped by all creatures.
- 14 Blessed are you also, Mary, whose name
 is great and exalted⁵⁷³ because of your Child.
 Indeed you were able to say how much and how
 and where the Great One, Who became small, dwelt in you.
 Blessed is your mouth that gave thanks but did not inquire
 and your tongue that praised but did not investigate.
 Since His mother was awed by Him, although she bore Him,
 who is sufficient [to know] Him?
- 15 O you, woman that no man knows,
 how shall we see the Son you have brought forth?
 For the eye is not able to understand
 his glorious transformations.
 For tongues of fire dwell in Him
 Who sent tongues at His ascension.⁵⁷⁴
 Let every tongue be warned that our investigation is stubble
 and our scrutiny [is] fire.
- 16 Blessed is the priest⁵⁷⁵ who in the sanctuary
 offers to the Father the Father's Child,
 the Fruit plucked from our tree,

572. The Syriac uses ■ plural here and in the following line.

573. This word, differently vocalized, is Mary's name!

574. Cf. Acts 2.3.

575. Simeon, cf. Luke 2.22–35.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

although He is entirely from majesty.

Blessed are the consecrated hands that offer Him
and his lips wearied with kissing Him.⁵⁷⁶

The Spirit in the Temple longed to exalt Him,
and when he was crucified it tore [the veil] and went out.⁵⁷⁷

17 That chief of the angels greeted you⁵⁷⁸
as the pledge of holiness.

The earth became for him a new heaven
in which the Watchers came down and praised.

The sons of the height gathered around your dwelling
because of the King's Son Who dwelt in you.

Your earthly habitation became like heaven above
by their vigil.

576. Here I have departed from Beck's text, reading *wlspwrb* rather than *wlsybth*, and leaving *d'r'mly* unchanged.

577. Cf. Mark 15.28 et par. and Luke 2.27.

578. Mary. On Gabriel as "chief of the angels" rather than Archangel, cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 95f.

This hymn is a meditation on the biblical account of the seven days of creation in relation to the Christian understanding of the incarnation (esp. str. 3–10).⁵⁷⁹ Evidently because of the liturgical context, other materials related to the birth and infancy of Jesus provide a framework for the hymn (str. 1–2, 11–13). Thus, Ephrem begins by relating the first year of Jesus' life to the first day of creation (str. 1). Next he considers events attributed to the second year of Jesus' life: the visit of the Magi and the slaying of the innocents (str. 2). But this direction is temporarily abandoned in favor of a theological consideration of the days of creation.

In the central portion of the hymn he discovers a typological aspect in the description of each of the days of creation in Genesis. The creation of light on the first day provides a meditation on the role of Christ as Light of the world (str. 3). The first day, like Christ the First-born, the Logos, represents the pillar of creation and root of the universe (str. 1 and 4). Just as on the second day the waters of the firmament were separated, Christ separated from heavenly beings to come down and give us water to drink (str. 5). The third day, on which plants were created, recalls Christ the Holy Blossom as well as the source of all growth (str. 6). The fourth day brings a meditation on the sun and moon, light and sight (str. 7). The creation of reptiles on the fifth day provokes a consideration of Satan and the Fall (str. 8). Adam's creation on the sixth day provides an opportunity to contrast the poison of the forbidden fruit with the Medicine of life (str. 9). The day of God's rest is symbolic not only of the sabbath rest and the divine care for creatures but also of subjection and freedom (str. 10).

Leaving the Genesis account of creation, Ephrem returns in the last few strophes to themes related to the infancy of Christ. The eighth day recalls the circumcision of Jesus and Christian rejection of the practice (str. 11). The tenth day is remembered due to the perfection of the

⁵⁷⁹ The hymn and its theology are discussed in el-Khoury, *Interpretation*, 49–62, as well as in Kronholm, *Motifs*, 41f.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

number ten (str. 12). Finally, without mentioning the fortieth day,⁵⁸⁰ Ephrem recalls the day of purification as a symbol of Christ, the Purifier of all (str. 13).

26

Change of melody

Refrain: Blessed is Your birth that makes all Creation glad!

- 1 The first year of our Redeemer's birth
is the source of blessings and foundation of life.
For by it are borne a multitude of victories
and the sum of helps.
As the first day "in the beginning"
the great pillar of the creation
bears the building of the creation,
so the first-born day [bears] the helps for humanity.
- 2 In the second year of our Redeemer's birth
the Magi are glad, the Pharisees are gloomy,
treasures are opened, kings are hastening,
and infants are slain.
For in it are offered in Bethlehem
desirable and fearful gifts.
For love offered gold,
but envy [offered] infants by the sword.
- 3 The day of the All-Illuminating is glad at His birth.
It is a pillar of rays that pursues with its beams
the works of darkness in a type of that day
on which light was created
and tore away the darkness
spread over the beauty of creation.
The ray of our Redeemer's birth
entered and tore away the darkness upon the heart.

⁵⁸⁰. Although Luke was confused about the relation between purification and circumcision, Ephrem seems to realize the purification would be later; cf. Brown, *Messiah*, 447f. and Lev. 12.1ff.

HYMN 26

- 4 The first day, the source and beginning,
is a type of the root that germinated everything.
Much greater than it is our Redeemer's day⁵⁸¹ planted in the
universe.
For His death is like a root⁵⁸² inside the earth,
His resurrection like the summit in heaven,
His words [extend] in every direction like branches,
and like His fruit [is] His body for those who eat it.
- 5 Let the second day sing praise on the birth
of the Son, the Second,⁵⁸³ and the Voice of the First.⁵⁸⁴
He commanded the firmament and it came into existence; He
divided the waters above,
and He gathered the seas below.
He Who separated the waters from the waters
separated from the Watchers and came down to humankind.
Instead of the waters He commanded and they were gathered,
He let flow a source of water and gave [it] to drink.
- 6 Let the third day weave with hymns
a crown of psalms⁵⁸⁵ and offer [it] with one voice
for the birth of Him Who made flowers and blossoms grow
on the third day.
But now He Who makes all things grow,
came down and became a Holy Blossom.
From the thirsty earth He sprouted, and He went up
to adorn and crown the victorious.
- 7 Let the fourth day confess fourfold
the birth of Him Who created on the fourth day
the pair of luminaries that fools worship
and they are blind and unseeing.

581. The two phrases are inverted in the Syriac.

582. The Syriac word is not the same as a few lines previous.

583. I.e., second after the Father. Although this seems susceptible to an Arian interpretation, the following phrase makes it the most likely reading. Another, less likely, possibility is that "second" should be attributed to "birth" rather than "Son," meaning the birth from Mary in the incarnation as opposed to the birth from the Father before all time.

584. I.e., the Voice of the Father. Ephrem's Logos theology is evident here. For some discussion cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 39–43.

585. The phrases are inverted in the Syriac.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- He*, the Lord of the luminaries, came down,
and like the sun He shone on us from the womb.
His radiances have opened [the eyes of] the blind;
His rays have enlightened the straying.
- 8 Let the fifth day praise Him Who created
on the fifth day creeping things and dragons
of whose kind is the serpent. He deceived [and] led astray our
mother,
a young girl without understanding.⁵⁸⁶
Since the deceiver mocked the young girl,
the fraudulent one was exposed by the Dove
Who shone forth and emerged from an innocent womb,
the Wise One, Who crushed the crafty one.
- 9 Let the sixth day praise Him Who created
on Friday Adam whom the evil one envied.
As a false friend he pleased him [by] offering him poison in [his]
food.
The Medicine of Life diffused Himself to them both.
He put on a body and was offered to them both.
The mortal tasted Him and lived by Him;
the devourer who ate Him was destroyed.⁵⁸⁷
- 10 Let the seventh day cry "holy" to the Holy One
Who sanctified the Sabbath to give rest to living beings.
The untiring Gracious One took care of humanity and He took care
of animals.
Since freedom fell under the yoke,
He came to the birth and was subjected to free [it].
He was struck a servant's slap in the court.
As Lord, He broke the yoke upon the free.
- 11 Let the eighth day that circumcised the Hebrews
confess Him Who commanded His namesake Joshua⁵⁸⁸
to circumcise with flint the People whose body [was] circumcised
but whose heart was unbelieving from within.

586. Eve's childishness makes her vulnerable to the serpent. On this theme, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 98–107, but his stress on her "infantilism" is too negative since naïve innocence is an equally important nuance, cf. Nat. 7.7, 7.11 and note ad loc.

587. On the punishment of the serpent, cf. Nat. 13.2 and note ad loc.

588. In Syriac, as in Hebrew, Jesus and Joshua are the same name.

HYMN 26

Behold on the eighth day as a babe
The Circumciser of all came to circumcision.⁵⁸⁹

Although the sign of Abraham was on His flesh,
the blind daughter of Sion has disfigured it.

- 12 Let the tenth day praise its number
for yodh, the letter of the fair name of Jesus,
in counting is ten. This [number] that is like a lord
reverses the numbers.

For whenever counting goes up to ten,⁵⁹⁰
it goes back to begin from one again.

O great mystery that [is] in [the name] Jesus
Whose power turns Creation back again!

- 13 The First-born, Purifier of all, on the day of His purifying
purified the purification of the first-born and was offered.⁵⁹¹
The Lord of offering was in need of offerings
to make an offering of a bird.⁵⁹²
By His birth were completed the archetypes:
He came and paid the debts by His descent;
by His resurrection He ascended and sent treasures.⁵⁹³

589. Luke 2.21.

590. Cf. Nat. 25.10, 27.2-4.

591. Cf. Luke 2.22-24.

592. Ibid.

593. According to Ephrem the true meaning of the offering of birds in Judaism was fulfilled in the incarnation and resurrection of Christ—His coming down and going up like a bird.

This hymn is a calendrical speculation on the relation of solar phenomena, numbers and letters of the alphabet to the conception and birth of Jesus and to the name of Jesus. Ephrem reads these details as divine hints pointing to Jesus' status as "Son of the Lord of the universe." Especially prominent here is the association of Jesus with Sol Invictus, the Unconquered Sun.

Six and ten, perfect numbers, are the dates of Jesus' birth and conception. Further the letter yodh, which represents the number ten in Syriac, is also the first letter of Jesus' name—thus indicating his mysterious status. The names of Joseph and John the Baptist begin with the same letter as Jesus, and Mary's name begins with the same letter as Messiah—all to indicate the power of Jesus, the Messiah (str. 2–13).

Christ is represented by the sun in three ways. The descent and ascent of Christ are prefigured by the sun's setting and rising (str. 14–16). The conceptions of John the Baptist in a dark month and of Jesus in a light month are types of the two births of Christ: the first birth from the Father, hidden from all; the second from Mary, revealed to all (str. 17–20). Finally, and most important, the conception and the birth of Christ take place at the moments of the sun's victories in spring and in winter (str. 1 and 21–22).

Change of melody

- 1 Light was like a harbinger
to that Bright One to Whom Mary gave birth,
for His conception was in the victory of light,
and His birth was at the victory of the sun. Blessed be the
Conqueror!

HYMN 27

Refrain: To You be glory, Son of the Lord of the universe! (Repeat).

- 2 "Yodh" stands at the beginning of Your name.⁵⁹⁴
 It stands at the tenth in the month of April.
 On the tenth You entered the womb.
 Your conception was in a symbol of the perfect number.
- 3 The number ten is complete;
 on the tenth of April You entered the womb.
 The number six is also perfect;
 on the sixth of January Your birth gave joy to the six directions.
- 4 The number ten is the sum,
 and the sixfold is the sum of sums.⁵⁹⁵
 On the tenth [was] His conception, on the sixth His birth.
 His birth gave joy to the four directions [and the height and depth].
- 5 Joseph's name was not sufficient
 for him to be Your father since it was [too] weak.
 Your name gave [his name] the letter "yodh";
 Your name strengthened Joseph's name to be father to You.
- 6 "Messiah," too, in its compassion,
 gave the first of its letters to Mary's name.
 Behold! Their names depend on His names
 even as their bodies, with all creation, depended on His power.
- 7 For Mary, that [woman] who bore Him
 in the womb and on her lap—Him, the Messiah—

⁵⁹⁴. The mystical interpretation of numbers in relation to the letters that represent them is ■ standard device of rabbinic exegesis, gematria; cf. C. Levias, "Gematria," JE 5, 589–92, and G. Scholem, "Gematria," EJ 7, 369–74.

⁵⁹⁵. Ten is the sum of the numbers one through four. Six times six is the sum of the numbers one through eight. In contrast to the mixing of numbers and letters characteristic of rabbinic gematria, the mystical interpretation of the properties of the numbers themselves originated with the Pythagoreans, made its way into popular Hellenistic culture and eventually, through Philo and the Alexandrian Christian exegetes, to Augustine and the medieval West; cf. V.F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York, 1938); M. Comeau, *Saint Augustin, exégète du quatrième Evangile*, 2d ed. (Paris, 1930), 127–42; M. Pontet, *L'exégèse de S. Augustin prédicateur* (Paris, 1945), 278–303. Similar notions are to be found in Syriac and Greek Patristic sources; cf. R. W. Thomson, "Number Symbolism and Patristic Exegesis in Some Early Armenian Writers," *Handes Amsorya* 90(1976), 117–38; A. Guillaumont, *Les 'Kepbalaia Gnostica' d'Evagre le Pontique et l'Histoire de l'Origénisme chez les grecs et chez les syriens*, *Patristica Sorboniensia* 5 (Paris, 1962) 34f.; McVey, *Microcosm*, 100; but no study to date has investigated Ephrem's sources for these ideas or their relation to the rabbinic gematria.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- the first of the letters of [her] name was messiah.
She bore His name as His power bore her body.
- 8 For without His power
Mary could not bear His body.
He showed the hidden by way of the revealed,
since not even their names could exist without Him.
- 9 He gave the heads of His letters
to His parents who were His heads,
and as their bodies were adorned by Him,
so, too, He adorned their names with His names.
- 10 Nor again did that John
baptize His body without His power.
“Yodh” bore the name of John
as Jesus’ power bore John.
- 11 But if He bestowed the beauty
of His letters on their names,
if he mixed some of His glorious beauty in their names,
how much, indeed, did He mix His hidden power in their names!
- 12 Just as enumeration
has only ten levels,
there are six sides to the creation:
the height and depth and four directions filled by You.
- 13 The letter “yodh” of Jesus, our King,
is the Queen of all numbers.
On her perfection depend all reckoning
as in Jesus all meanings are mixed.
- 14 The Greatest of all descended utterly
to unspeakable humiliation.
He returned from that humiliation
to seize the unlimited height on the right hand.
- 15 [It is] a great wonder that from that height
He did not proceed little by little
to descend [and] come to smallness.
He flew from the womb of Divinity to humanity.
- 16 For the sun—that sun of Yours—
announces Your mystery as if by mouth.
In the winter, as Your type, it descends to a low level;
in summer, like You, it ascends to the height and rules over all.

HYMN 27

- 17 Also the type of Your conception, my Master,
and [the conception] of John, Your harbinger,
the mystery of Your conceptions and Your births,
by light and darkness are portrayed and revealed to one who
perceives.
- 18 The conception of John took place
in October in which darkness dwells.⁵⁹⁶
Your conception took place in
April when the light rules over darkness and subdues it.⁵⁹⁷
- 19 I give thanks for Your first birth
hidden and concealed from all creatures.
I also give thanks for Your second birth,
revealed and younger than all creatures who yet [are] in Your
hands!⁵⁹⁸
- 20 The births of the Only-Begotten,
one above and one below,
one the stranger, strange to all,
and one the kinsman, allied utterly to humanity.⁵⁹⁹
- 21 Again, as if by a symbol
the day of Your birth falls in January
when light snatches from darkness
the hours it swallowed, just as You snatched us from our
swallower.⁶⁰⁰
- 22 April portrays Your conception when it cried out
"Behold the Light confined in the womb!"
In January the pair of lights emerged:
You from the womb and the sun with You from within the dark.

596. Tishri (October–November) is after the autumnal equinox, hence nights are lengthening. Ephrem has apparently deduced the time of John's conception by extrapolation from the Lucan infancy narrative, cf. Luke 1.24–26.

597. The vernal equinox in Nisan (April) marks the point when the days begin to be longer than the nights.

598. The first birth is of the divine Son from the "womb of the Divinity" before the creation of all things; the second is the birth from Mary of the incarnate Christ.

599. Here Ephrem, like other anti-Arian polemicists, contrasts the utter uniqueness of the generation of the Son by the Father (or, to use the female imagery Ephrem often prefers, the birth of the Son from the womb of the Father) with the familiar human birth of the incarnate Son.

600. Conun (December–January) contains the winter solstice. On the theme of Christ as the Unconquered Sun, cf. Nat. 5.13–15.

28

The hymn is a meditation on Mary's virginity as appropriate to the indwelling of the Son of God in her. She is a holy thing, set aside for God's presence on earth. Just as the animals in Noah's ark were chaste, he begins, how much more should Mary be chaste (str. 1). This is not because marriage is unacceptable, but because chastity is better, a heavenly and angelic state (str. 2-4). Paradoxically Mary is both virgin and mother (str. 5). Her virginal conception implies the freedom from sexual desire since such a desire would have no purpose (str. 6). The Divine Presence suffused Mary entirely during her pregnancy (str. 7). Even from Holy Scripture, Error may gather poison for those who love her (str. 8), but the church is like a bee gathering the nectar from the Egyptian and Hebrew fields (str. 9). Since the Jewish people have not accepted it, it has been gathered by the Gentiles. (str. 10)

28

The same melody⁶⁰¹

- 1 If the animals in the precious tent
in the ark were chaste,
how much [more] would Mary in whom dwelt Emmanuel
turn against marriage.
Your will increased you and sanctified you.⁶⁰²
Your Lord increases and adorns you, as well.
The animals of Noah were compelled by force,
but you [chose] by your will.
Refrain: Glories to His birth!

601. I.e., the melody is the same as in Nat. 25, which precedes this hymn in the manuscript chosen by Beck.

602. Mary is addressed here.

HYMN 28

- 2 That chief of the angels greeted you⁶⁰³
as the pledge of holiness.
The earth became for him a new heaven
in which the Watchers came down and praised.
The sons of the height gathered around to serve you
because of the King's Son Who dwelt in you.
Your earthly habitation became like heaven above
by their vigil.
- 3 But intercourse is not defiled,
nor is marriage accursed.
Chastity's wings are greater and lighter
than [the wings of] marriage.⁶⁰⁴
Intercourse, while pure, is lower.
Its house of refuge is modest darkness.
Confidence⁶⁰⁵ belongs entirely to chastity,⁶⁰⁶
which light enfolds.
- 4 Light shone forth upon your⁶⁰⁷ residences
and gave no space to marriage,
for there were no doers of the secret [deed].
Inside your⁶⁰⁸ dwelling full of glory
the shadows of dissoluteness and desire
were dispersed by the Savior's rays.
Spiritual woman, all of you has become spiritual
since you have given birth to the spiritual man.⁶⁰⁹
- 5 The conception hinders our saying, "she is a virgin,"
and [if we say] "a man's wife," the signs of virginity cry out.⁶¹⁰
The body is one and does not allow us
to say she is [both] a virgin and a man's wife.
It was a wonder and a marvel for the vigorous,⁶¹¹

603. Mary is addressed. This strophe is identical with Nat. 25.17.

604. For the wings of chastity, cf. Virg. 1.7.

605. Literally, "baring of the face," perhaps equivalent to the Greek παρησία. For ■ similar idea, cf. Virg. 3.3.

606. Literally, "Is entirely chastity's."

607. The addressees are the angels.

608. The addressee is Mary again.

609. This is addressed to Mary.

610. Cf. Nat. 11.1.

611. i.e., the ascetics.

HYMNS ON THE NATIVITY

- It was a vexation and a torment for the learned.⁶¹²
The signs of virginity were hidden, but the breasts were full.⁶¹³
To Him be praises because of all.
- 6 Earthly conception is the cause of its impulse,
the bodily desire that is in the members.
Your refined conception wipes clean [and] dissolves
the impulsive desire of your members.
Holiness and purity he poured forth [and] filled you
with holy floods. He purified you,
so that one who saw you would say, "How good is she⁶¹⁴—
that glorious woman!"
- 7 Since the Conception⁶¹⁵ is the Glorious One, He stamped Himself,
as if by a signet upon your mind.⁶¹⁶
Although He was begotten,⁶¹⁷ indeed He was in you
so that entirely gazing out from your members
was His brightness, and upon your beauty was spread
His love, and upon all of you He was stretched out.
You wove a garment for Him,⁶¹⁸ but His glory extended
over all your senses.
- 8 How Error has erred in culling
bitterness from sweet flowers,
in the same manner as she eats sweet fruits,
and by her they are transformed to deadly gall!
Even from fragrant scripture Error culls
poison for her lovers.⁶¹⁹

612. Or "for scribes," i.e., the rabbis.

613. Cf. Nat. 11.4.

614. Literally, "how her goodness."

615. The Syriac word, *btm*, used here and in the previous strophe, may have the sense of either the act or moment of conception or the thing conceived, the fetus.

616. For the signet or seal as a representation of the Logos, cf. Nat. 1.99.

617. Or, "although He was born"—the translation preferred by Beck. Beck understands Ephrem to say that even after the nativity, Christ was present in Mary. I think, instead, that Ephrem is making his frequently-stated point that the presence of Christ in Mary as a fetus did not prevent His simultaneous presence in the universe as Logos; cf. Nat. 4.126–213.

618. During her pregnancy, Mary wove the garment of Jesus' body for Him; pace Beck ad loc. and at Epiph. 13.3, where he rejects his earlier understanding as stated in Beck, Mariologie, 30. Ephrem likes the image of Jesus' body as a garment woven variously by the Deity, cf. Nat. 21.5, or by Mary, as here. The weaving of new baptismal garments by the Holy Spirit in Epiph. 13.3 does not demand a consistency, which is not present in Ephrem's use of the image.

619. On the dangers of faulty exegesis, cf. HdF 53.7.

HYMN 28

They receive the cup, in which the sons of the serpent⁶²⁰
have mixed the dragon's gall.⁶²¹

- 9 Now for you, good Church, ■ bee
who has many sweet blossoms,
one is Egyptian,
the second is Hebrew.⁶²²

From holy flowers you cull.

From all of them you gather all help.

Good Church, from the blossoms of your temple,
you gather sweetness.

- 10 Your type is portrayed by the bee⁶²³
who left the blossoms in her region,
flew, not a little [distance], to diffuse the smell
of the sweet Blossom that sprouted in Judea,
and came and gathered in her ears
the sweetness of her proverbs and brought [them] forth.
But Jerusalem made her pour out the sweetness
so that the Gentiles ran [and] collected it.

620. Heretics, cf. CH 1.13.

621. On the Fall as a poisoning for which Christ, the Medicine of life, is the antidote, cf. Nat. 26.9, but for the venom of the heretics, cf. CH 1.11.5.

622. The Syriac calendar divided Nisan, the season of Spring, into two parts, which correspond to the two months, March and April. Beck suggests that the allusion here is to the Exodus and the Christ-event.

623. Literally, "the bee portrays your type." Clement of Alexandria uses ■ similar image to describe his teacher, Pantaenus; cf. Clem. str. I.1.

Hymns against Julian

On the Church

This first hymn concerning Julian was composed in anticipation of his arrival in Nisibis soon after the apostate emperor's accession. From the beginning Ephrem sets forth his central theological theme: There is no reason to fear that God has abandoned his church; the true Christian must not lose hope but persevere under conditions of duress (str. 1). As the examples of Elijah and Daniel show, the courage to rebuke idolatrous tyrants is required of us by our Creator, and we will be vindicated for it (str. 4–7). The hymn is particularly rich in vineyard imagery.¹ The incarnation itself is symbolic of the fact that God does not ever forget us, for Christ the True Vine bent down to rescue us (str. 8–9). The present time is a transitory period of trial in which the true fruits will cling to the True Vine while the wild grapes are cast away (str. 5, str. 10–11). Now that the plenitude of summer has been replaced by winter, true Christians will continue to love the Vinedresser (str. 12–14). Or alternatively, now that the refreshing shade of the Christian emperors has been withdrawn “to make us mindful of our drought,” we have an opportunity to show fidelity and perseverance (str. 14–15).

On the Church

Again, on the melody of paradise.

- 1 Rely on the truth and fear not, my brothers,
for our Lord is not weak that He should desert us in trials.
He is the power on Whom depend² the creation and its inhabitants.
On Him depends the hope of His church.
Who is able to cut off its³ heavenly roots?

1. Cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 106–13.

2. Throughout the hymn Ephrem plays on the literal and figurative meanings of *tl'*, “to hang, to depend.”

3. I.e., hope's.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- Blessed is He Whose power came down and was mingled with his churches!
- 2 Bestow on yourselves, my brothers, the treasure of consolation from the word our Lord spoke about His church,
"The bars of Sheol cannot conquer her."⁴
If, indeed, she is mightier than Sheol,
who among mortals can frighten her?
Blessed is He Who made her great yet has tested⁵ her that she might be greater!
- 3 Reach out,⁶ indeed, your hands toward the Branch⁷ of Truth that has torn asunder⁸ the arms of warriors without being bent. She bent down from her height and came down to the contest. She tested the true, who hung on her, but those hanging with an [ulterior] motive withered and fell. Blessed is He Who brought her down to go up in triumphs!
- 4 Elijah, then, was drunk with the love of the True One, and without fear he seethed and confronted the house of Ahab,⁹ who demeaned the Creator and worshipped creatures: Jezebel led her retinue to Sheol.
The crowns of seven thousand men were glorious.¹⁰
Blessed is He Who revealed to his servant concerning hidden treasure!
- 5 The sons of truth, then, grow large on this Branch of Truth; they have been perfected and have become fruits fit for the kingdom.
But, although the Branch is living, on it are also dead fruits that blossom [only] apparently.

4. Matt. 16.13–20, esp. 18.

5. Literally, "but has turned and tested."

6. Ephrem puns on "reach out," *pšwṭw*, here and "has torn asunder," *pšht*, below.

7. The word *swkt'*, "branch," is grammatically feminine. Since it is customary to refer to the church with feminine pronouns, this convention is easily followed here insofar as the Branch of Truth represents the church. However, it also represents Christ or the Second Person of the Trinity, to whom it is not customary for us to refer with a feminine pronoun. In the context of *kenosis* other early Christian traditions refer to the motherhood of Jesus or use the feminine Sophia rather than Logos to refer to the Second Person of the Trinity; cf. Bradley, Background. With this in mind I have followed the Syriac more literally, translating with feminine pronouns all references to the Branch of Truth.

8. Here Murray suggests "has wearied," cf. Symbols, 107, n. 5.

9. For similar expressions regarding prophetic utterances, cf. Nat. 5.19.1, 6.14.1, 7.12.3.

10. I.e., the 7,000 who did not worship Baal; cf. 1 Kgs. 19.18.

ON THE CHURCH

The wind¹¹ tested them and shook down the wild grapes.
Blessed is He Who crowned by it¹² those who held fast in Him!

- 6 The love of the All-reviving tested Daniel
by the contract contrived by the cunning¹³ to hinder
his acceptable prayer that exposed their idols.¹⁴
They demeaned their graven images, unwittingly.
He brings to nought their acts of worship that One may be
worshipped by all.

Blessed is He Whose true ones confounded the erring!

- 7 She bent down [and] shed her friends into the fire.
Her leaves bore dew [and] cooled the furnace.
Conquered were the arms of the conqueror who had decreed
that the Most High would bow down before his images.
His friends who did not abandon Him were not abandoned by
Him.

Blessed is He Who, instead of an image, is praised by His
worshippers!

- 8 Jesus, bend down to us Your love that we may grasp
this Branch that bent down her fruits for the ungrateful;
they ate and were satisfied, yet they demeaned¹⁵ her who had bent
down

as far as Adam in Sheol.

She ascended and lifted him up and with him returned to Eden.

Blessed is He Who bent her down toward us that we might seize
her and ascend on her.

- 9 Who indeed will not weep that although the Branch is great,
the weakness of one unwilling to seize her greatness
maintains that she is a feeble branch—

she who has conquered all kings and cast a shadow
upon the entire world! By suffering her power has increased.

Blessed is He Who made her greater than that vine from Egypt!¹⁶

- 10 Who will not hold fast to this Branch of Truth?

11. Or "spirit."

12. I.e., by the wind or spirit.

13. The Syriac is active.

14. It is more ■ decree than a contract, cf. Dan. 3.3-7.

15. Literally, "but they turned and demeaned."

16. Ps. 80.8.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

She bore the true ones; she shed the false.
Not because they were too heavy for her¹⁷ did she shed them.
For our sake she tested them in the breeze;
it shook down the shriveled; it ripened the firm.
Blessed is He Who rejected the vineyard that was a source of wild
grapes!¹⁸

- 11 Because they were unfaithful to that Branch of life—
in the time of her exaltation they sit in her shade.
In the time of her humiliation they are ungrateful—
they resemble the momentary passers-by
who turn aside and pluck the fruit but abandon¹⁹ the vines.
Blessed is He Whose workers remain in His vineyard!

- 12 But because the summer by its fruits has forced
the greedy to become friends to the laborer,
winter can argue persuasively that the unfaithful
loved not him but their bellies.
In summer they ran after him; in winter they fled from him.
Blessed is He Who made a crucible that tries the two sides!

- 13 Because, indeed, the summer adorns the things of summer
so that like itself they, too, are workers in the vineyard,
it is winter that exposes those who plucked and carried away,
while the true worker remained.²⁰

He was crucified with the wood Whose fruits he ate.
Come, let us be hung on the wood that gave us the Bread of life!

- 14 Since Our Lord granted me, too, to enjoy myself in summer
with fruits and the shadows of this Branch of the universe,
let me be among the workers, the demeaned, the winter ones,
lest, indeed, I have two seasons:
in summer within her, in winter far from her.

Grant, my Lord, by Your grace that we all may hold fast to You!

- 15 The kings who used to provide shade, cooled us in the droughts.²¹
We ate their fruits; we were ungrateful for their branches.
Our soul luxuriated in the bounties and shadows.

17. Literally, "for her strength."

18. Isa. 5.2-6.

19. Literally, "let go and abandon."

20. Literally, "who plucked, carried and took away, but he who was a worker remained."

21. Constantine and Constantius, cf. CJ 1.12.1.

ON THE CHURCH

Our mouth raved and attacked²² our Creator.
Battles in the shadows we waged with our investigations.
He has stripped away our shade to make us mindful of our drought!
Blessed is He Whose grace provides shade for us!
Blessed is He Who worked in us grace without measure!

22. Or "mused upon, studied"—the double meaning is appropriate since Ephrem characteristically reproaches the Arians for arrogantly examining the nature of God.

1

This is the first of four hymns explicitly against Julian, composed after the apostate emperor's defeat and death. Having assured his church in the previous hymn that despite appearances, God has not abandoned his flock, Ephrem now extends his argument to encompass the new events and to offer a positive interpretation of the whole. There has been a cosmic alignment of forces, of all the good against all the evil. On the one side with God are the church and the angels; on the other are Satan and his demons, Julian, all the wild, repugnant and monstrous forces, the pagans with their idols, the heretics and the Jews. For Julian was not a true king, whose sceptre drives away the wild animals like a shepherd's crook (str. 1). Instead of protecting his flock, he had left them open to the ravages of the wild animals, that is, the Persians, his true allies (str. 2). The rejoicing of the wild beasts, the resuscitated idols, and Satan and his demons were short-lived, since they all fell with the emperor (str. 3-7). But first there had been a period of persecution, apostasy of those less firmly rooted, and suffering for the faithful (str. 8-11). The peaceful harmony of the reigns of Constantine and Constantius had allowed untried Christians to mingle unnoticed with the true (str. 12-13). Unwittingly, the forces of Error had glorified the true by exposing the hidden apostasy of faithless Christians (str. 14-15). The Jews, too, Ephrem claims, were exposed as idolaters, seeing in Julian's coinage the golden calf of Sinai, and following him as they had followed Jereboam (str. 16-19). Like Nebuchadnezzar, the apostate has been rebuked by God (str. 20).

HYMN 1

*Against Julian,
The King Who Apostatized*
✠
Against The Heretics and The Jews

1

On the melody: Rely on the truth

- 1 The sceptre of kingship shepherds humankind,
cares for cities, drives away wild animals.²³
The opposite was the sceptre of the king who apostatized.
the wild animals saw it and exulted:²⁴
the wolves were his partisans; the leopard and the lion raged;
even the foxes raised their voices.
- 2 The wolves saw the clouds, rain and whirlwind.
Calling to one another, they attacked. Ravenous, they rampaged.
Utterly hemmed in, they were all furious.
They surrounded the blessed flock.
But the sceptre that had gladdened them was broken and moved
them to regret.
a crushed reed²⁵ was the support of the left hand.²⁶
- 3 They fled back into their caverns, dark and primeval.
The fear they had stripped off, they put on again in their dens.
The creation that had been gloomy, brightened and exulted,
but the rebels were trampled.
The heads of leviathan were smashed in the midst of the sea,²⁷
and his crawling tail was shattered in the midst of the dry land.
- 4 The living dead²⁸ awoke and were resuscitated.
Thinking themselves revived, they were rebuked—how they were
disgraced!

23. The *casus pendens* construction of the Syriac is difficult to translate into graceful English.

24. The Sassanid Persians are meant.

25. 2 Kgs. 18.21 (Isa. 36.6).

26. I.e., the forces of evil.

27. Ps. 74.13–14.

28. I.e., the pagans.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- Being resuscitated, they revived graven images.²⁹
The idols confuted the apostates.
One is the death of pagans and tares,³⁰
all of whom took refuge at once in the same one.
- 5 At that time, then, the mud seethed and spewed out
vermin of all sizes and worms of every sort.
They bred, and the earth was full of them in the middle of winter.³¹
The breath of the dragon made the earth seethe,
but the One equipped with the sandal of truth
despised the poison of the stings of the sons of error.³²
- 6 Those who stood with the overthrown³³ fell with the fallen.³⁴
They persevered, thinking even they could stand firm.
The fools clung to one another, but as it transpired they all fell.
Their fall attested their impediment:
although divided, they agreed on the stumbling block.
In the love of one king they were joined.³⁵
- 7 When demons rejoiced, they suddenly revived with them.
When the Evil One was jubilant, they exulted with him.
As if by a mystery, time arranged
for all of them at once to be dependent on one.
They made themselves brothers and members of one another,
for they all depended on the head of the left hand.
- 8 For while the right hand was grieved over sinners,
the children of the left hand rejoiced greatly.

29. On the importance Julian ascribed to the revival of pagan cult, and for a discussion of the date of its restoration, cf. Bowersock, *Julian*, 55–110 et passim, esp. 61, 70, 86f.

30. The tares are heretics. This agricultural imagery, rooted in the New Testament, esp. Matt. 13.24–30 et par., is common to early Christian literature, but recieved relatively little emphasis in Syriac Christian literature before Ephrem, who uses it frequently; cf. *Nat.* 3.15, *CN* is 20, 29, 31, 33, and Murray, *Symbols*, 195–99. For the more common Early Syriac theme of the vineyard, cf. *ibid.* 95–130.

31. Ephrem alludes to Julian's seizure of power in December 361. A traditional portrait of Julian as the hesitant and fortuitous heir to Roman power is presented by Browning, *Emperor*, 95–122. Bowersock portrays Julian's rise to power as more calculated, Bowersock, *Julian*, 46–65.

32. Although the identity of the champion of truth here is unclear, Christ probably is meant, and the contest portrayed is between Christ and Satan. It is also possible, however, that Ephrem alludes to the rumors that Julian had arranged for Constantius to be poisoned; cf. *King*, *Julian*, 27, n. 1.

33. I.e., the idols.

34. Julian. The word may also mean "deserter," thus alluding to his apostasy as well as his death in battle.

35. The king is not only Julian but also Satan, as the following strophe shows.

HYMN 1

In the season of the penitents, angels alone rejoice.

Without realizing it, fools behave in the opposite way.

Only the church agrees with the Watchers in both:

she suffers over the sinners but rejoices over penitents.³⁶

9 The Evil One saw that he had intoxicated and confused people.

He rejoiced and mocked freedom all the more

that people have so thoroughly enslaved themselves to him.

The Evil One was astounded how much he tore us to pieces,

but the fools, torn to pieces, did not feel their pains.

Although the Physician was near, they despised the cure.³⁷

10 The ugly, dark, all-gloomy winter³⁸

robbed the beauty of the all-rejoicing spring.³⁹

Thornbushes and tares were disgorged and sprang up.

The dry frost moistened

36. Cf. Luke 15.10. In this strophe Ephrem uses the two words most commonly chosen by him to denote angels: *ml'k* 'and 'yr', here translated "angels" and "watchers." The first has the root meaning of "messenger," is the most common designation of angels in the Bible, and carries the specific meaning characteristic of angels in the canonical scripture. "Watchers" is, on the other hand, the most common general designation of angels in Ephrem, especially in his earlier writings, and is characteristic of his angelology. Rooted in Iranian conceptions of Amesha Spenta and Mithra as heavenly beings who are constantly alert, never sleeping, this sort of angel appears in the extra-canonical I Enoch as well as in Syriac literature before Ephrem in the *Acts of Thomas* and in the writings of Aphrahat. The word 'yr' occurs in the Book of Daniel, thus giving a kind of biblical pedigree to a notion fundamentally unlike the usual biblical angel. Ephrem is aware of the root meaning of the word and sometimes indulges in elaborate word play on it. Watchfulness is symbolic of holiness; its opposite, sleep, represents sin and death. So Christ is the "Watcher" par excellence, who makes it possible for faithful Christians to be "watchers" and ultimately to live the angelic life, i.e., eternal life. For him the human life most like the angelic life is the ascetic life, a proleptic participation in the paradisaical state. His angelology probably derives from the general cultural context rather than from a particular literary work. Cf. W. Cramer *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephraim der Syrer*, OCA 173 (Rome, 1965), esp. 68f., 165–81.

The watching angels are here portrayed in one of their characteristic roles as a chorus viewing the drama of human salvation, rejoicing with those who repent or who resist temptation; cf. *ibid.* 64, 148–52, and for the same in Aphrahat, *ibid.* 49.

37. The common metaphor of Christ as physician is particularly prominent in Syriac Christian literature from the *Acts of Thomas* onward, and it also figures significantly in the Manichaean literature; cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 199–203. Ephrem uses the image frequently in his *Diatesseron* commentary and develops it especially in CNis 34; *ibid.* 200f.

38. Literally, "the month of *šbt*" (February–March). Ephrem may have in mind Julian's edict of 13 March 362, by which Christian clergy were no longer permitted to seek exemption from the decurionate; cf. *Cod. Theod.* XII.I.50; Bowersock, *Julian*, 73f. More probably, however, this is a broader allusion to the winter and spring of 361–62, which were marked by purges, reforms, new appointments and the gradual emergence of Julian's lack of tolerance for religious and philosophical views other than his own. For the sequence of events, cf. *ibid.* 66–85. For the suggestion that here *šbt* may mean "winter" as *nysn* often means "spring," cf. Beck, *CSCO* 175, 66, n.9.

39. *nysn*.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- brambles in the inner rooms and thistles in the courts.
 In this time the naked⁴⁰ and the barefoot⁴¹ shivered.
- 11 How the late seeding was afraid and terrified!⁴²
 For without effort it was sown and took root.
 Uprooted were the aftergrowth, the self-sown growth sprouting
 throughout the world,⁴³
 and that which had quickly risen to the surface,
 but the seed of effort that struck root profusely—
 its fruit came a hundredfold, sixty and thirtyfold.
- 12 The truth-loving kings⁴⁴ in the symbol of two bulls
 yoked together equally the two Testaments.⁴⁵
 With the yoke of harmony they worked and adorned the earth.
 But the thorns clothed themselves in the beauty of the wheat,
 and the seed spread its appearance even upon the tares.
 Those who stripped away beauty did so in freedom.
- 13 Some of them were brambles, and some were wheat.
 Some were gold, and some were dust.
 The tyrant became a crucible for the beauty of the true ones.
 Who has ever seen such a glorious sight?
 For Truth entered and was tested in the crucible of the False One.
 Unwittingly, Error has glorified the true ones.

40. *šyḥ* may mean "naked" or "apostle," hence, as Beck suggests, "bishop." Ephrem's pun is probably intentional since he uses the same double entendre in HdF 74.7–9; cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 80f.

41. Again, a pun is possible since "barefoot" is a designation for ascetics in the Pseudo-Ephremic writings on monasticism; cf. Beck, *CSCO* 175, 67, n. 12; idem, *Asketentum*, 341–62.

42. Cf. Matt. 13.4–9, 18–23, et par.; weak Christians, possibly recent converts who have apostatized under persecution.

43. The Syriac is approximately equivalent to Greek οἰκουμένη, the inhabited world.

44. Constantine and Constantius. On Constantine as champion of orthodoxy against heresies due to his summoning of councils, cf. CH 22.20.10. Although he portrays Constantius as pious, pure and favored by God, cf. CJ 2.19, 2.25, 3.8, 3.10, 4.15, Ephrem passes over the question of orthodoxy with regard to this emperor. Given Constantius' well-known Arianism and Ephrem's polemics against that heresy, it is clear that the hymnodist consistently overlooks Constantius' heretical views of the sake of his contrast with Julian. Elsewhere, comparing him with Pilate, he exculpates him of responsibility for the Arian persecutions of the orthodox; cf. HdF 87.21, noted by Murray, *Symbols*, 66, n.2; discussed at greater length by Griffith, *Ephraem*, esp. 31–37. Similarly Gregory of Nazianzus in his invective against Julian makes only slight reference to these persecutions; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 4.37, and Murray, *Symbols*, 61f.

45. The precise meaning is unclear. Ephrem evidently intends to contrast orthodox Christianity with both Marcionite rejection of the Old Testament and Jewish rejection of the New Testament. It is remotely possible that he also intends a pun of Syriac *ṭwr*, "bull," and Hebrew *Torab*, the "Law."

HYMN 1

- 14 All who were apostates rejoiced in the apostate—
the sons of the left hand in the head of the left hand.
In him they could see who they themselves were,
since he became a mirror for all of them.
Those who rejoiced over his victory shared his lot,
inasmuch as disgrace befell them from his death.
- 15 For it was the church alone that opposed him utterly,
and they and he together opposed her utterly.
Without dispute this is sufficient to teach
that they were on one side and she on the other.
The furtive ones, who were believed not to belong to them,
hastily associated themselves with them.⁴⁶
- 16 The People raged and raved and blared the trumpet.
They rejoiced that he [was] a soothsayer and were jubilant that he
was a Chaldean.
The circumcised saw the image that suddenly was a bull.⁴⁷
On his coins they saw the shameful bull,
and they began to keep its feast with cymbals and trumpets,
for they recognized in that bull their ancient calf.
- 17 The bull of paganism engraved on his heart
[Julian] imprinted on that image for the People who love it.⁴⁸
Perhaps the Jews cried out to that bull,
“Behold the gods who will lead
your captives up from Babylon into the land they devastated,

46. The Syriac is more vivid: “they strung themselves with them [like beads] on a chain.” The partisans of Julian here seem to be lukewarm Christians or even secret pagans, who like the emperor himself, disguised their beliefs until the death of Constantius. Possibly, however, he alludes to Jewish supporters of Julian, as in the following strophe.

47. As the following line indicates, Ephrem refers to the image on Julian’s bronze bull coinage. Its iconography has been variously explained as: 1) the Egyptian god Apis (Eckhel, Babelon, Stein, Mattingly, Elmer), 2) a rhetorical symbol of the good emperor (Kent), 3) a Mithraic bull (Thieler), 4) the zodiacal symbol Taurus, allegedly Julian’s birth sign, thus a representation of Julian himself (Gilliard); for discussion and bibliography, cf. F.D. Gilliard, “Notes on the Coinage of Julian the Apostate,” *JRS* 54 (1964), 135–41, esp. 138–41. Bowersock argues that Ephrem’s construal of the bull as the golden calf shows either that virtually no one understood the iconography (cf. Julian, 104), or that Julian issued the coins on an occasion having to do with his relations with the Jews (cf. *Numen* 28 [1981], 88–93, esp. 91). But Ephrem’s association of the bull with the golden calf may be simply an idiosyncratic juxtaposition for the sake of his invective, meant especially to discredit the Jews by association with this *locus classicus* of idolatry.

48. Or “who love [Julian]” or “whom [Julian] loves.”

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

as the molten calf led you out of Egypt!"⁴⁹

- 18 A king, the Babylonian king, suddenly became a wild ass,⁵⁰
but he learned to be subjugated; he who used to kick, kicked no
more.

A king, the Hellenic king,⁵¹ suddenly became a bull
and gored the churches, but he was dragged away.
The circumcised saw the bull imprinted on the staters,
and they rejoiced that the calves of Jereboam were revived.⁵²

- 19 Perhaps because of that silver coin on which the bull was portrayed,
the Jews were overjoyed that [Julian] carried it in his heart
and also in his purse and in his hand
as a type of that calf of the wilderness
that was before his eye and heart and mind;
and probably in his dreams he used to see the calf.

- 20 A king, the Babylonian king, went mad and went out into the
countryside.

He was made to wander in order to be gathered in; he was
maddened in order to come to his senses.⁵³

He made God rejoice and made Daniel exult.

A king, the Hellenic king, has been rebuked,
for he angered God and denied Daniel,⁵⁴
and there near Babylon he was judged and condemned.⁵⁵

49. Exod. 32.8.

50. Although the reference is clearly to Nebuchadnezzar, as Beck suggests, cf. Dan. 4.28–33, it is odd that Ephrem refers to him as a "wild ass," (*rd'*) where the Peshitta uses "bull" or "wild ox," *rwv'*, the same word he used for the image on the coinage and in the next lines for Julian, "the Hellenic king."

51. In referring to Julian as "the Hellenic king" (*mlk ywn*) Ephrem emphasizes his "Hellenism," i.e., his pagan beliefs. If he meant to refer simply to Julian as Roman Emperor, the metrically equivalent *mlk rwm'*, would be more normal parlance since Syriac writers continued to refer thus to the emperors well into the Byzantine period.

52. Jereboam instituted a rival to the Jerusalem cult by setting up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and telling the people this was the god who brought them up out of Egypt, as in str. 17 above; cf. 1 Kings 11.26–15.34, esp. 12.26–32.

53. Cf. Dan. 4.31–37.

54. By attempting to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, Julian denied the testimony of Daniel 9.24–27, which Ephrem and many other Patristic writers understood to prophesy the permanent destruction of the Temple, cf. CJ 4.20.

55. Julian's death on the Persian campaign is the divine punishment for his apostasy; further, cf. CJ 3.1–9, 13–17.

Here Ephrem alludes to the tenth chapter of John's gospel which portrays the good shepherd whose sheep know him and who lays down his life to protect them from the wolf. Like Jesus, Constantius was a true shepherd, but Julian is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Characterizing the Jews as goat kids, he enlarges on the theme introduced at the end of the previous hymn, Jewish acceptance of Julian's leadership (str. 1). He implies that the emperor was a false messiah for them since he played the roles of prophet, king and priest (str. 2). Alluding to the attempt to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, he claims that the emperor's "pledge" swayed them to continue to accept him after he shed his "sheep's clothing" by declaring his polytheistic beliefs (str. 1, 3.4). This shows, he argues, that the Jewish rejection of Jesus had been motivated by a hidden yearning for polytheism (str. 3).

Ephrem then returns to the larger theme of the divine purpose in these events. God has made Julian a mirror in which to see the falsity of pagan religion and the destruction that awaits those who put their trust in its oracles (str. 4–15). He claims that, despite the personal asceticism of the emperor, his religion is characterized by lascivious revelry, resembling the Israelite worship of the golden calf (str. 4–7). Just as the golden calf was destined for destruction, Julian, like an unwitting goat kid, was prepared for sacrifice by the falsity of his pagan oracles (str. 8–15). Nisibis is also a mirror displaying a contrapuntal lesson: As long as the people placed their trust in God and were faithful to him, they were preserved from Persian capture; only when they succumbed to idolatry was the city lost to the Persian forces (str. 16–27). Ephrem describes the dramatic and successful earlier defenses of Nisibis, associating their success with the piety of Constantius as well as of the city's inhabitants (str. 19–20, 25). The city was taken only when the inhabitants restored an idolatrous cult, and when they were led by an emperor who entrusted his plans to soothsayers, who nevertheless proved vulnerable even to the mundane deceit of traitors (str. 12, 15, 17, 18, 25). Even Shapur grasped the lesson God intended all to see in the fate of Nisibis, for he showed

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

respect for the Christian religion but not for Julian's paganism (str. 22–24, 27). Although the apostasy of some of the city's Christian inhabitants and the restitution of the pagan cult have resulted in God's anger and the loss of the city, the freedom of its inhabitants to emigrate to Roman territory rather than being exiled eastward into the Persian realm is a sign of divine mercy (str. 26–27).

2

- 1 The wolf borrowed the clothing of the True Lamb;
the innocent sheep sniffed at him, without recognizing him,
for he had greatly deceived that shepherd who died.⁵⁶
But when the wolf emerged from within the lamb,
stripped off [and] shed his beauty, the kids took his scent.
They hated the ewes, but loved him as a shepherd.

*Refrain: Blessed is He Who blotted him out
and has afflicted all the sons of error!*

- 2 They rejoiced that he was a Chaldean; they were jubilant that he
was a soothsayer.
They became arrogant that he was king; they were joyful that he
was a priest.
They rejoiced that he filled the place of many,
of kings and queens of the sort
of Ahab⁵⁷ and Jeroboam,⁵⁸ of Jotham⁵⁹ and Manasseh,⁶⁰

56. The Emperor Constantius, unaware of Julian's pagan beliefs, had appointed him Caesar.

57. Ahab is best remembered for marrying Jezebel and introducing Baal worship in Israel, cf. 1 Kgs. 16.29–34.

58. Cf. CJ 1.18.6 and note ad loc.

59. Jotham, son of Uzziah, ruled Judah for sixteen years. Although he is presented in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles as a good king, Ephrem apparently wishes to recall the criticism that he did not put an end to the worship in the high places that Jeroboam had reestablished, cf. 2 Kgs. 15.32–38, 2 Chron. 27.1–9.

60. Manasseh not only reinstated the Baal worship his father had ended, he also practiced child-sacrifice, augury, divination and magic, and he introduced an idol into the Temple at Jerusalem. When he was captured by the Assyrians and taken in chains to Babylon, however, he repented. Restored to power, he later purified the worship of Judah and regained the favor of Yahweh, cf. 2 Chron. 33.1–20.

HYMN 2

of Jezebel⁶¹ and Athaliah,⁶² sources of paganism.⁶³

- 3 They rejected the Savior, the witness of the True One,
Who, when they asked Him, taught, "One alone is God."⁶⁴
Being pagans, they crucified Him and went astray with many
[gods].

They rejoiced in the abominable pledge.⁶⁵

Through his sacrifices he hired and brought ten gods⁶⁶
to heap up sheaves of thorns for Gehenna.

- 4 He led his gods and the goddesses he forged.
He clothed himself in auguries and set out—he and the soothsayers
and conjurers.

All the sons of error equipped him with their prayers,
and he set out with the promises of powerful men.

He took his conveyance⁶⁷ and smote it and brought
a crown of disgrace for all his partisans.

- 5 The goddesses rampaged with his gods,
and the one who denied chastity⁶⁸ was not ashamed to proclaim

61. Jezebel, wife of King Ahab, came to her Baal worship naturally, being the daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre. Her corrupting influence on Israel is well-known, as is her persecution of the prophet Elijah and his successors, and her ignominious death, cf. 1 Kgs. 16.31, 1 Kgs. 18, 19, 21, and 2 Kgs. 9.30–37.

62. Athaliah, who was a daughter of Omri, a consort of Ahab and the mother of Ahaziah, ruled for six years. A devotee of Baal, she was killed when Jehoiada, a priest of Yahweh, led a revolt against her, cf. 2 Kgs. 8.26 and 11.1–20.

63. In his second invective against Julian, Gregory Nazianzen also invokes the images of Ahab and Jeroboam in connection with the rebuilding of the Temple, but rather than the other kings and queens of Israel whom Ephrem mentions here, he adds Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh to his list; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.3.

64. Mark 12.29.

65. The pledge is Julian's promise to rebuild the Temple, cf. CJ 1.16–20 and 4.18–25.

66. The Syriac word here indicates a group of ten, for which there is no English equivalent. "A dozen gods" would give the sense loosely.

67. The Syriac here can mean chariot or throne. Since the context is a description of Julian's setting out on the Persian campaign, possibly this is an allusion to his fleet and its destruction as Beck suggests *ad loc.*

68. The Syriac word *nkpwrt* may mean modesty or chastity in a general sense, or it may be a *terminus technicus* for monasticism. Julian was critical of Christian monasticism, which he saw as akin to the "pseudo-Cynicism" of his time; cf. Bowersock, Julian, 81f. and Malley, Hellenism, 148–55. The emperor was, however, himself very dedicated to an ascetic lifestyle, justified in neo-Platonic terms; cf. Amm. Mar. 25.4.2–6, Libanius Orat. 18.179, Bowersock, Julian, 79–93, and Malley, Hellenism, 226–35. Even his devotion to the Great Mother (Cybele-Atargatis) was compatible with his asceticism since she had acquired astrological and philosophical underpinnings by this time, as Julian's hymn to her demonstrates; cf. the introduction II, D. Ephrem's point, however, is that this juxtaposition is not possible. John Chrysostom voices a similar complaint about Julian's devotions to Aphrodite, probably another reference to the same syncretistic cult; cf. *Liber in Sanctum Babylon Contra Julianum et Gentiles* 14, noted by Beck *ad loc.*

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

male idols who raved after female idols.⁶⁹

A he-goat and also a priest he was for them.

For a shameful [goddess] he abstained [from cutting] his beard and
let it grow,

and he bent down to let the smoke of the fumes rise into it.⁷⁰

6 Agreeable to him was the feast of the detestable idol

on whose feastday women and men rave,
virgins fornicate, and wives become lascivious,
vomit out [and] speak words of shame.⁷¹

He loved filthy feasts and despised the blessed
feastdays of chastity and the Pasch of honor.⁷²

7 The pagans carried their idols and raved,
and the circumcised blew trumpets and raged,
and all of them chanted with their voices and behaved wantonly.⁷³

It was a festival like the one in the wilderness.

The Gracious One Who chastened those who rampaged with a calf,
[and] Who chastened the many who rampaged with a king—

8 He broke that calf to pieces to cut short the rampage,
and He undid that diadem to cut off the frenzy.

Like a physician He cut off the cause of the rampage.

69. Or "and lusted after" or "raved in pursuit of female idols." The Syriac is alliterative.

70. Clearly aware that Julian's beard is intended to symbolize his philosophical and theological commitments, Ephrem mocks this idea by the use of the root *nzr*, "to abstain, to become a Nazirite." In the context of Israelite prophecy the Nazirite vow to abstain from wine and the razor was a sign of a charismatic call; cf. Num. 6.1–21, 1 Sam. 1.22, Judg. 13.2–7. The notion carried over into early Christianity and especially in the Jewish-Christian encratite environment; cf. Brown, *Birth of the Messiah*, 210f. Given his insistence that Julian was promoting obscene worship, his use here is strongly ironic, and the characterization of the emperor as a he-goat both alludes to his beard and carries the suggestion of lewdness. Popular mockery of his beard in Antioch had led Julian to write his satirical *Misopogon*, where he himself refers ironically to goats; cf. Jul. Imp. Misop. 338C–339B, and Bowersock, *Julian*, 13. The criticisms continued and included mockery of his "billy goat's beard" as well as his excessive sacrificial offerings and his inappropriate assumption of priestly prerogatives, so that they called him "a slaughterer rather than a high priest," cf. Amm. Mar. 22.14.2–3.

71. For a similar description of the feast of the "raving goddess," cf. CH 9.8.3.

72. Alternatively "and honorable merriment," but since the pagan celebration of which he complains here is probably the festivities of the Great Mother in late March, cf. CJ 2.5.2 and note ad loc., a specific comparison with Easter is more likely.

73. Although it sounds as if pagans and Jews celebrated a festival together, for his polemical purpose Ephrem has merged the celebrations of the two communities. Possibly he has in mind the celebration of Pasover which would be at about the same time as the Great Mother's feast. In addition, Julian's announced intention to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem may have been the cause of additional rejoicing for the Jewish community. Further cf. CJ 4.18–23 and notes ad loc.

HYMN 2

- In the south⁷⁴ both were overthrown.
 By means of hard iron He destroyed that calf,
 and with a terrible spear he destroyed that king.⁷⁵
- 9 He-goats from the people⁷⁶ of that goat-kid,
 who grew their curls and stank in their beards,⁷⁷
 surrounded the black one who did not look at marriage,
 who was continent and purified for his shameful [goddess].⁷⁸
 The flocks of the left hand stirred up by their oracles
 the goat-kid who set out to become a victim in the midst of Persia.⁷⁹
- 10 By their oracles they broke the reed of the tares,⁸⁰
 the pillar and column upon which had been supported
 thorns, sons of his people, and brambles, sons of his race.⁸¹
 As he set out he threatened the grains of wheat
 that he would return and bury them in the thicket of his
 paganism.⁸²
 The Cultivator of justice destroyed the tares.
- 11 That haughty and arrogant thornbush, as it is written,⁸³

74. In Sinai and Babylon, respectively.

75. In the case of the calf, the precise allusion is unclear, cf. Exod. 32.20, but for Julian's case, cf. CJ 3.14.

76. Here and in CJ 2.10.3 "his people" is *gnsb*, from Greek γένος, not 'mm' as in references to the Jewish people.

77. Ephrem puns on *spry* "goat-kid" and *zprw* "they stank." The emperor's philosophers and religious advisors are the subject here.

78. Here and in CJ 2.5.5 one might read "for his shame" or "to his disgrace" rather than "for his shameful goddess," but Beck's suggestion that this is an allusion to a goddess is most probable since the word may refer to an idol (*bhrt*); cf. Margoliouth 37a). On Julian's preference for continence, cf. CJ 2.5 and note ad loc. He specified the relationship between the Great Mother's cult, allegorically interpreted, and abstinence of various sorts, cf. Jul. Imp. Orat. 5 174B–178D.

79. The pagan oracles and interpreters of omens encouraged Julian to undertake his Persian campaign. Yet, at least according to the hindsight of Ammianus, it seems that many omens were negative or at least ambiguous as the campaign proceeded; cf. Amm. Mar. 22.12.6–8, where Ammianus expresses doubt over the qualifications of some of those consulted; Amm. Mar. 23.1.4–7, 23.2.6–8, 23.5.6, and 24.6.17 for unfavorable omens; Amm. Mar. 23.3.3, for unfavorable dreams; Amm. Mar. 23.3.6 and 23.5.8–14 for omens Julian mistakenly interpreted as favorable. As a convinced pagan, Ammianus had an interest in showing that Julian's disastrous campaign was not encouraged by the gods, just as Ephrem wished to show that the emperor had the best advice available from pagan sources.

80. Ephrem alludes both to Pharaoh as a broken reed (2 Kgs. 18.21) and to the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13.24–30).

81. The Syriac is *twbmb*.

82. Julian's anti-Christian measures reached a peak in spring 363 as he set out on his Mesopotamian campaign, cf. Bowersock, Julian, 79–93, esp. 92.

83. 2 Kgs. 14.9. The thornbush of Lebanon writes to the cedar of Lebanon asking for his

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

determined to bend down cedars and cypresses
and willed to grow thorns and tares.

[God] made it a broom,⁸⁴ but it did not disperse.

The Just One swept together in him the abomination of paganism
and took [and] hurled his paganism into a distant place.

- 12 For Truth to conquer one at a time would have been a small thing.
He swept together [and] bound up the diviners and soothsayers in
one king

and gave them the opportunity to put on a helmet and arm
themselves,

and in the one he conquered all of them,
and upon all of them he stretched out the measuring line of disgrace,
for the sons of error lied, all of them in everything.

- 13 If all of them together lied in their oracles,
taken individually how much each one lied in his oracle!
Hogs got down [and] wallowed in their detestable filth.
This is the herd [of swine] that defiled the world,
who came down and rolled in dust and got up and shook themselves
off.

It has happened and does happen that they lead many astray.

- 14 The king, the king of Babylon, confuted the Chaldeans,
nor did he summon others, for he tested one in another.⁸⁵
He cast them out [and] expelled them; to slaughter he gave them.
That one, indeed, whose own they were, renounced them.
But if they misled him, how much indeed will they mislead you!
For if all of them lie, who indeed will trust one?

- 15 For [Julian] foretold and promised and wrote and sent to us
that he would come down and trample it; Persia he would
disperse.⁸⁶

Singara he would rebuild.⁸⁷ [This was] the threat of his letter.

daughter to be given in marriage to his son; he is trampled by the animals of Lebanon as they pass by.

84. For *mknšt* 'as "broom," cf. Payne-Smith I, 1774f., *scopa*, *verriculum*. This meaning suits the context here and in the remainder of the strophe where God is portrayed as the Great Housekeeper in the Sky.

85. Dan. 2.1-13. When Nebuchadnezzar tested the soothsayers in his kingdom, on the basis of the answers of some, he convicted all and condemned them to death.

86. The Syriac also contains a pun: Persia . . . disperse = *lprs mprs*.

87. Singara had been taken by the Persians in 360, Amm. Mar. 20.6.

HYMN 2

Nisibis was taken away by his campaign,
but by his conjurers he cast down the power in which they
believed.⁸⁸

As a [sacrificial] lamb, the city saved his encampment.⁸⁹

16 Nisibis that was captured—as a type of mirror⁹⁰
[God] set it up, that we might see in it the pagan who set out
to take what was not his; he lost what was his.

For it was the city that proclaimed to the world
the shame of his conjurers and became his constant reproach.
He surrendered the constant unwearied herald.

17 This is the herald that with four mouths⁹¹
cried out into the whole world the disgrace of his conjurers.
The gates that were opened by the sieges also opened
our mouth for the praise of our Savior.
Behold! Shut up today are the gates of that city
that the mouth of pagans and heretics might be shut up with them.

18 Let us seek the cause how and why
the shield⁹² of all the cities, that city, was given up.
The madman raged and set fire to his ships near the Tigris.
Without his being aware the bearded ones deceived
the he-goat who promised that he knew secret things.⁹³

88. Pace Beck, who citing Ephrem's claim of widespread paganism in the Roman army, cf. CJ 3.10, here translates, "das Heer, das an ihn glaubte."

89. I.e., Nisibis was ceded to Persia in exchange for safe passage for the Roman army.

90. The image of the mirror is used variously by Ephrem. Here the image in the mirror serves as a warning example, cf. Beck, Spiegel, esp. 10–16.

91. The four mouths are the city gates; thus the news went out in all directions.

92. The word has the same root as "shut up" in the previous strophe, *skr*.

93. According to Libanius, Julian simply decided to burn his fleet rather than risk the Persians' acquisition of it or the continued commitment of manpower needed to bring it in the upstream retreat (Libanius, Orat. 18.262–3; repeated by Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 3.26, 28, 29). The same explanations are offered by Ammianus Marcellinus, but he mentions traitors who admit to deceit when they are tortured, and he describes a belated reversal of the decision to burn the boats (Amm. Mar. 24.7.4–6). The fullest explanation would seem to be in Gregory Nazianzen's second invective against Julian (Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.11–12). According to Gregory, Julian was deceived by a Persian nobleman who represented himself as alienated from Shapur, but who was in reality still in the service of the Persian ruler. Using essentially the same arguments that Libanius and Ammianus attribute to Julian himself, this supposed renegade persuaded him to burn his fleet and promised that he himself would conduct him by a secret overland route to his troops in the north. Once the ships had been torched, however, the Persian had disappeared. The discussion in Bowersock, Julian, 114f., is most helpful. Browning's account of two Persian noblemen who confess when put to torture, is apparently a conflation of Ammianus Marcellinus' and Gregory's accounts, cf. Browning, Emperor, 208f. The only discrepancy between Gregory's version and Ephrem's is that Ephrem, like Ammianus Marcellinus,

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

He was deceived in visible things to be disgraced in hidden things.

- 19 This is the city that had heralded the truth of its Savior:
seas broke through suddenly, battered it, but were overcome.
The earthworks were brought down, but the elephants were
drowned.

The king by his sackcloth preserved it.⁹⁴

The tyrant by his paganism cast down the victory
of the city that prayer had crowned with triumphs.

- 20 Truth was its bulwark and fasting its rampart.
The Magi came, threatening, but Persia was disgraced in them,
[as] Babylon in the Chaldeans and India in the sorcerers.
For thirty years the truth encompassed it.⁹⁵
In the summer in which an idol was set up in the city,⁹⁶
compassion fled from it, and anger overran it.

- 21 For empty sacrifices emptied its fullness.
Demons, sons of the wasteland, laid waste to it by libations.
The [pagan] altar⁹⁷ that was built, rooted out and expelled
that altar whose sackcloth⁹⁸ had delivered us.
The feasts of frenzy silenced His feastday.
While the sons of error served, they put to an end His service.

- 22 The Magus who entered our place regarded it as holy, to our
disgrace.

He neglected his fire temple but honored the sanctuary.⁹⁹

He cast down the [pagan] altars built by our laxity;
he destroyed the enclosures¹⁰⁰ to our shame.

refers to two or more men, rather than a single man. On the other hand, if Gregory were somehow aware of Ephrem's remarks as well as Ammianus' account, his version could be an elaboration on them.

94. In the third siege of Nisibis in 350, the Persian strategy, which entailed damming the Mygdonius River to flood the city walls, met with some success, but the Nisibenes managed to rebuild the walls and save the city; cf. CNis 1-3. Ephrem here credits the success to the piety of Emperor Constantius.

95. As Beck notes, the precise period between the first attacks and the fall of Nisibis was twenty-six years, 337-63 C.E.

96. For further evidence of the idolatry in Nisibis, cf. Beck ad loc. and Soz. HE 5.3.

97. Literally "high place," *'lt'*, in contrast to *mdbh'* in the following line.

98. Cf. CNis 4.27, and Beck's remarks ad loc.

99. Syriac *mqdš'*, apparently the Christian church.

100. Syriac *bbwšt'*. Beck suggests that heretical cult rooms are meant, citing CH 1.18.1, where the reference is to the Bardaisanites. That is, the cult places are destroyed by Shapur to the shame of Christians, who should themselves have destroyed them.

HYMN 2

- For he knew that from one temple¹⁰¹ alone emerged
the mercy that had saved us from him three times.¹⁰²
- 23 How much indeed truth revealed its face in our city!
Everywhere it showed itself through our breaches
to the point that even the blind saw it in our preservation.
The king in our deliverance recognized it.
Since he had seen it outside of our city in triumphs,
when he entered into the city, he honored it with offerings.
- 24 The war was a crucible, in which the king saw
how beautiful the truth and how ugly falsehood is.
He learned through experience that the Lord of that house
is gracious and just in all things.
For He wearied him and did not give him the city that believed in
Him,
but when the sacrifices angered Him, He surrendered it without
effort.
- 25 The sackcloth of the blessed one preserved the city that was head
of the region of Mesopotamia, and it was magnified.
The tyrant by his blasphemy humbled and abased it.
Who can weigh how great is its dishonor?
For the city that had been head of the entire West
was made the hind feet¹⁰³ of the East.
- 26 [This] city was not considered like all the [other] cities.
For how many times did the Gracious One deliver it from within
Sheol
[in] the battle under the earth and the battle above it,
but when it refused its Savior, He abandoned it.
The Just One, Whose anger is mighty, mingled His love with anger,
so that He did not lead us away as captives and exile us, [but] let us
dwell in our land.¹⁰⁴

101. Syriac *bykl'*.

102. That is, he recognized that the Christian God had saved the city in the three unsuccessful sieges.

103. Literally, the "other heels."

104. That is, God did not punish the people of Nisibis by allowing Shapur to exile them to the distant East, as in the case of Singara, cf. Amm. Mar. 20.6.7, and Fiey, Nisibe, 36. Although it is unclear whether "our land" refers to the Syriac-speaking region or the Roman Empire, in either case Edessa would be included. Alternatively, but less plausibly, one might surmise that Ephrem composed this hymn before learning of the need to vacate the city.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- 27 Whereas the [Roman] king became a [pagan] priest and dishonored
our churches,
the Magian king honored the sanctuary.
His honoring our sanctuary has doubled our consolation.
[God] saddened and gladdened us but did not exile us.¹⁰⁵
He reproved that errant one by means of his erring counterpart;
since the priest oppressed, He rewarded the Magus.¹⁰⁶

105. Alternatively, the subject could be Shapur rather than God.

106. Again, the subject could be Shapur, translating as Beck, "while the priest oppressed, the magus rewarded." The more obvious sense, however, is that God reproved Julian by rewarding Shapur.

3

Ephrem continues the argument he began in the previous hymns, that the loss of his city to Persia was a great divine lesson on the errors of idolatry. The keynote here is the coincidence in time of the raising of the Persian standard over the city and the bringing of Julian's corpse into the city, to which he has himself been witness (str. 1–3). The poet portrays himself mocking the corpse of the emperor and his presumptuous claims, meditating on the transience of temporal power as compared with God's, and mourning the folly of those who succumbed to the pretenses of Julian (str. 4–6). Next he addresses the principal difficulty in his view: the lengthy and inconclusive struggle for survival under Constantius (str. 7–12). The war remained without a decisive victory in the first half of the fourth-century not because the Christian God was unable to bring victory but because he was waiting for Julian's paganism to come into evidence so that he could serve as an example for all the world of the inefficacy of the Hellenic deities and their oracles (str. 7–9). Even Roman defeats under Constantius and the standard of the cross can be explained away as the fault of hidden pagans among the soldiers, just as Joshua's defeat at Ai was not a sign of the weakness of the Ark of the covenant but of the disbelief of some of the army (str. 10–11). Finally, Ephrem, to whom human freedom is supremely important, argues that Julian's death was the just and freely chosen consequence of his pride coupled with his stubborn refusal to admit the error of his religious beliefs and the injustice of his anti-Christian measures (str. 12–16). Divine justice and respect for human freedom does not, however, prevent God's providing an intricate interlacing of symbolism for the edification of all. In this case Ephrem discovers a fourfold mystery of lances (str. 14), and a pun linking Julian's mocking epithet of the "Galileans" with the angelic "wheels" of God's mighty chariot (str. 17). To his way of thinking these relationships serve as substantiation of his argument no less than the example of Joshua at Ai.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

3

- 1 A wonder! By chance the corpse of that accursed one,
crossing over toward the rampart met me near the city!
And the Magus took and fastened on a tower
the standard sent from the east,¹⁰⁷
so that this standard-bearer would declare to the onlookers
that the city was slave to the lords of that standard.

Refrain: Glory to the One Who wrapped the corpse in shame!

- 2 I wondered, "Who indeed set ■ time for meeting
when corpse and standard-bearer both at one moment were
present?"
I knew it was a prearrangement, a miracle of justice
that when the corpse of the fallen one crossed over,
the fearful standard went up and was put in place to proclaim
that the evil of his conjurers had surrendered that city.
- 3 For thirty years Persia had made battle in every way
but was unable to cross over the boundary of that city;
even when it had been broken and collapsed, the cross came down
and saved it.¹⁰⁸
There I saw a disgraceful sight:
the standard of the captor set up on the tower,
the corpse of the persecutor laid in a coffin.
- 4 Believe in "yes" and "no," the word of a trustworthy man,¹⁰⁹
that I went right up, my brothers, to the coffin of the filthy one,
and I stood over him and derided his paganism
and said, "Is this indeed he who exalted himself
against the Living Name and forgot that he is dust?"

107. Ammianus informs us that the standard was erected by the Satrap Bineses, as noted by Beck, cf. Amm. Mar. 25.9.1. But Ammianus takes this as the sign that all must leave the city, and he stresses Jovian's incompetence and his responsibility (rather than Julian's) for the situation; cf. Amm. Mar. 25.9.2–12. Like Ephrem, he praises the constancy of Nisibis, Amm. Mar. 25.9.8–11.

108. Cf. CJ 2.20.4 and CJ 2.19.

109. Cf. Matt. 5.37.

HYMN 3

[God] turned him back into his dust to let him know he was of dust.¹¹⁰

- 5 I stood and wondered at him whose downfall I had so fully seen.
 "This is his majesty and this is his pomp!
 This is his kingship and this is his chariot!¹¹¹
 This is a clump of earth that has disintegrated!"
 I argued with myself, "Why in [the time of] his power
 did I not foresee this would be his end?"
- 6 I wondered about the many who, in seeking to please
 the diadem of mortality, denied the universal Life-giver.
 I looked above and below and was amazed, my brothers,
 that our Lord [is] His height, the Glorious One,
 and the accursed one in [his] downfall, and I said, "Who will fear
 this corpse and deny the True One?"
- 7 He prevented the cross that came down from gaining victory,
 not because the victorious [cross] was unable to gain victory,
 but so that a pit might be dug for the evildoer
 who came down with his conjurers to the east.
 But since he came down and was struck, the discerning saw
 that the battle in which he would be put to shame had been lying in
 wait for him.
- 8 Know that because of this the time was long and delayed
 so that the pure one might complete the years of his kingship
 and the accursed one might also complete the measure of his
 paganism.¹¹²
 But when he had completed his story, he came to ruin.
 So both sides rejoiced, and so there was peace
 through the believing king, companion of the glorious [kings].¹¹³

110. Cf. Gen. 3.19. The Syriac word *pr* here translated "dust" and its derivative *prn*, "of dust," are different from the word "dust" in the previous line *dbyh*.

111. The Syriac *mrkbt*, rendered "conveyance" at CJ 2.4, may allude again to Julian's fleet, but it also has the sense of "throne" or "chariot," cf. CJ 3.17.

112. That is, Constantius was to finish his reign and Julian to complete his anti-Christian measures before God would permit a decisive end to the conflict between Rome and Persia.

113. That is, both Romans and Persians rejoiced at the conclusion of a peace treaty by Jovian, an orthodox Christian elevated by the *imperium* by the troops after Julian's death. Although Jovian, then, actually ceded Nisibis to Persia, Ephrem credits him with the peace but blames Julian for the loss of the city. Ammianus takes the opposite tack, cf. CJ 3.1 and note ad loc.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- 9 The Just One by all [manner] of deaths was capable of destroying him,
but he kept [for him] a downfall fearful and bitter,
so that on the day of his death all things should be drawn up before his eyes:
Where is that oracle that reassured him?¹¹⁴
and the goddess of weapons that she did not come to his aid?
and the companies of his gods that they did not come to save him?
- 10 The cross of the All-knowing marched before the army.
It endured being mocked: "It cannot save them!"¹¹⁵
It kept the king in safety; it gave the army to destruction,
for it knew that paganism [was] among them.¹¹⁶
Let the cross of Him Who searches all, therefore, be praised—
[the cross] that fools without discernment reviled at that time.
- 11 For they did not persevere with the standard of the Savior of all.
Indeed that paganism that they showed in the end
was manifest to our Lord from the beginning.
Yet although He knew well that they were pagans,
His cross saved them, but when they apostatized from Him,
they ate corpses there; they became a parable there.¹¹⁷
- 12 When the People was defeated at Ai of the weak,
Joshua tore his garments before the Ark [of the covenant]
and spoke fearful [words] before the Most High.
A curse [was] among the People, without his knowing.¹¹⁸
Just so paganism was hidden in the army,
but instead of the Ark they were carrying the cross.
- 13 But Justice summoned him with wisdom,
for not by force did she govern his freedom.
By an enticement he marched out to the lance that struck:
he saw that he subdued citadels, and he became proud.
For adversity did not cry out to him to turn back
until he marched out and fell into the midst of the vortex.

114. Cf. CJ 2.9.6 and note ad loc.

115. Cf. Mark 15.29–32 et par. The cross was among the standards at the head of the Christian Roman army.

116. As Beck suggests, the events of 347 and 359–60 are meant here, and the "King" is Constantius.

117. The idea seems to be that the desperation of Julian's army in 363 became proverbial.

118. Cf. Josh. 7.1–26.

HYMN 3

- 14 The lance of Justice passed through the belly of him¹¹⁹
 who despised Him Who made the lance of paradise pass away.¹²⁰
 The divination of the conjurers tore open a pregnant [animal].
 [Julian] groaned at length¹²¹ to recall
 what he had written and published that he would do to the
 churches.¹²²
 The finger of Justice blotted out his memory.
- 15 The king saw that Easterners came and deceived him.
 Simple men [deceived] the wise man; common men¹²³ [deceived] the
 diviner.
 Those whom he, wrapped up in his vestment,¹²⁴ summoned,
 confined his wisdom by ignorant men,
 and he gave orders to set fire to his victorious ships,

119. Julian was struck in the liver, cf. Amm. Mar. 25.3.6, and Bowersock, Julian, 116ff. Gregory Nazianzen similarly dwells on the notion that the "soothsayer" was wounded in the entrails; cf. Greg. Naz. Orat. 5.13. Unlike Ephrem, who does not mention who hurled the fatal lance, Gregory knew four different versions of this part of the story: that Julian's killer was 1) a Persian, 2) a disillusioned Roman officer, 3) a barbarian camp follower, 4) a Saracen desirous of fame; cf. Bowersock, Julian, 116 and J. Fontaine, *Ammien Marcellin, Histoire* v.4.2 (Paris, 1977), 213f.n.528 and 251, n.623. Although he initially assumed that Julian's assailant was "some Persian," Libanius later became convinced that Christians conspired to kill him either directly or through the agency of "some Arab" (for the assumption that a Persian killed him, cf. Lib. Orat. 17.32; for the rejection of that notion and the implication that Christians were responsible, Lib. Orat. 18.274.5; for the Arab acting at his leader's command in expectation of a reward, apparently from the Christians, cf. Lib. Orat. 24.6; for Libanius' insistence that the miscreants are privileged Roman Christians and should be punished, Lib. Orat. 24.8, 11, 17–41). The notion of a Christian plot against the life of the apostate emperor was taken up enthusiastically by the fifth-century ecclesiastical historian, Sozomen (HE 6.2), and more recently by Gore Vidal in *Julian* (New York, 1965), 411–31. Recent biographers of Julian have been more sceptical. Browning leaves the question open, 213–15. After a considerably more detailed discussion, Bowersock concludes that the Arab is the most probable culprit. For this conclusion the corroboration of Philostorgius is crucial (HE VII.15, ed. Bidez, GCS 21, 101, Eng. trans. E. Walford [1855], cf. Bowersock, 117f.)

120. Ephrem refers to the flaming sword barring the way to paradise, cf. HdP 2 and Graffin, Cherubin.

121. This translation, suggested to me by Glen Bowersock, seems preferable to Beck's "[Gott] schlug [ihn] und er stöhnte."

122. Possibly Ephrem alludes to Julian's *Against the Galileans* (cf. CJ 3.17 and note ad loc.), but more likely to his legal measures or the threats mentioned in CJ 2.10.

123. Or "swarthy, dark-complected men."

124. That is, Julian was wrapped in a priestly vestment. I have taken the participle *gryr* as masculine singular construct, dropping the final yodh of Beck's text. With that final yodh it could be plural but then should have *seyame*; in that case, those summoned would be in priestly vestments, but the vestment and its pronoun modifier are singular. Since the *šwšp'* is normally the vestment or robe of a judge, king or prophet (cf. Margoliouth 569b), Ephrem seems to be mocking Julian's notion of himself as a wise man, diviner or priest.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- and his idols and diviners were entangled in a trap.¹²⁵
- 16 But when he saw that his gods were confuted and exposed
and that he could neither gain victory nor flee,
[that] between fear and disgrace he was prostrate and beaten,¹²⁶
he chose death to escape into Sheol.
Cunningly he stripped off his armor in order to be wounded,
in order to die so that the Galileans would not see his shame.¹²⁷
- 17 For he had mockingly named the brothers Galileans.¹²⁸
Behold in the air the wheels¹²⁹ of the Galilean king!
He thunders in His Chariot; the Cherubim bear Him.
The Galilean revealed [the chariot]¹³⁰ and handed over
the flock of the soothsayer to the wolves in the wilderness,
but the Galilean herd increased and filled the whole earth.

125. Cf. CJ 2.18 and note ad loc.

126. Or "laid low and pulled apart."

127. Ammianus Marcellinus confirms that Julian was without his armor at the fateful moment, but he attributes this to Julian's rash courage; cf. *Amm. Mar.* 25.3.3-6, and *Lib. Orat.* 18.268. Gregory Nazianzen repeats Ephrem's accusation that Julian chose to die rather than to admit the hopelessness of his situation and the disgrace of his gods adding an apocryphal tale of Julian's attempt to throw himself into the river after being wounded, the better to be deified if his corpse were not found; for discussion, cf. *Greg. Naz. Orat.* 5.12, 5.14 and 4.59, the remarks of J. Bernardi ed., Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 4-5: Contre Julien*, SC 309 (Paris, 1983), 164-67, 314-21, and Bowersock, Julian 116.

128. No longer independently extant, Julian's anti-Christian polemic, *Against the Galileans*, has been reconstructed through Cyril of Alexandria's refutation. For the Greek text with English translation, cf. *Jul. Imp. Galil.* It has been carefully studied in Malley, *Hellenism*, and by P. Evieux, *Cyrille d'Alexandrie, Contre Julien*, T. 1, Livres I et II, Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, par P. Burguiere et P. Evieux, SC 322 (Paris, 1985), esp. 21-58; cf. also Bowersock, Julian, 102.

129. Ephrem puns on *gll* the root of "Galilean" and *ggl* the root of "wheel" as well as *gl'* "to reveal." The "wheels" are one of the groups of angels, who are associated especially with God's chariot; cf. *Virg.* 36.9.1, also Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 73-75, and Beck, *Reden*, 109.

130. Although Beck alters the text since he considers "revealed" to be out of the question, I have translated the received text under the assumption that the chariot is the direct object and that Ephrem alludes either to esoteric speculation on the chariot or, more simply, to the revelation of the power and majesty of God through these events; on the *merkabab* in Jewish sources, cf. Scholem, *Mysticism*, 40-79 et passim.

4

Having established both that Julian's death met the criteria of divine justice and that it was provided with clear symbolic indications of its importance for all, in this hymn Ephrem enlarges on its universal didactic purpose. That is, he returns his attention from the ethical lessons to be drawn from the faults of Julian as an individual to the lesson that Christianity is true whereas the emperor's paganism and his attempt to rebuild the Jewish Temple were mistaken religious policies. In tempting and persecuting the church, Julian had merely separated true believers from the false (str. 1-2). Had he only considered the signs, he could have realized the error of his ways. The wretched death of his uncle Julian was a clear warning for the apostate emperor of the death awaiting him (str. 3-4), but like Ahab, he preferred to listen to false prophecies (str. 5). Since he worshiped every other god except that of the Christians, it is abundantly clear which God is responsible for his defeat and ignominious death (str. 6). Likewise, the emperor's consultation of the best sorcerers proves the utter folly of their religion (str. 7).

As on the personal level, so on the religious level, Julian's death shows a kind of ironic suitability (str. 8-14). Foolishly he presumed that the god of the Babylonians would abandon his traditional worshippers to give victory to this upstart devotee (str. 8-11). Even had he found such extraordinary favor in the eyes of the sun-god as to be victorious over the Persians, Julian would have disproved his own religion by showing the injustice of its god and the folly of loyalty to such a tyrant (str. 12-14). The piety and modesty of Constantius, by contrast, were rewarded by his long rule and peaceful death (str. 15-16). Just as God used the sun to teach Jonah a lesson, He used an earthquake to teach a lesson to Julian and the Jews who accepted his plan to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (str. 17-20). The words of Daniel and of Jesus clearly state that the Temple will not be rebuilt and that this is the punishment for the crucifixion of Jesus (str. 21-23). The true consolation of Jerusalem and Zion lies not in the rebuilding of the Temple but in the visits of Christian pilgrims (str.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

23-25). Ephrem ends by reiterating his major theme: All the claims of paganism have been proven false in the fate of Julian (str. 26).

4

- 1 Oh, how cunning [is] the crucible that tested the king's daughter!¹³¹
He made merry with her, but she rejoiced not, cast gloom over her,
but she feared not,
gave to her, but she took not, pillaged her, but she succumbed not.
She uprooted his altars, and he was shaken.
When he tore away her limb, he experienced her courage.¹³²
Wisely he ceased,¹³³ lest he increase her¹³⁴ triumph.

Refrain: Glory to the One Whose truth confuted the liars!

- 2 In one member of her, therefore, he proved that all her members
were ready to take their crowns.¹³⁵
But seeing that force did not prevail over the true,
he put on enticement¹³⁶ and approached them.
He poured his rennet into her milk; unwittingly he strained it;
hers he left with her, but his he drew to himself.¹³⁷

131. Julian is the crucible, and, as Beck suggests, the king's daughter is the city of Antioch. Ephrem's alternating sentences describe well the emperor's first currying the favor of its citizenry, then angrily attempting to force them to change their ways. His attempts to reform the curia of Antioch to provide a firmer economic base for the city met with no success. Moreover, he objected to the luxurious living, the prominence of the games and theater in the life of the city and the neglect of the traditional pagan religion, especially at Daphne. Julian's difficulties there are documented in his own *Misopogon* as well as by Ammianus Marcellinus and Theodoret, cf. Bowersock, Julian, 79–105.

132. After the body of the martyr Babylas had been removed from Daphne—in Julian's view, in order to purify the shrine—the Temple of Apollo was burned. He blamed the Christians, who denied responsibility; cf. Amm. Mar. 22.13.1–3, Theod. HE 3.6–7. Ephrem portrays the subsequent persecution of the church of Antioch as the torture of a female martyr.

133. Julian abandoned his persecution in favor of other measures, cf. Soz. HE 5.4.

134. Beck's text erroneously reads "his"—a misprint unless Ephrem has changed the referent from the Christian church to the martyr Theodore, to whom he alludes in the following strophe.

135. Theodore's fortitude under torture was proof that the church of Antioch would endure persecution.

136. Ephrem puns here on "enticement," *šdl*, and "poured," *šd*, in the following line.

137. Rennet, or whey, is the agent used to curdle milk, separating it into curds and whey for cheesemaking. The persecution of the church separates it into apostates, represented by the

HYMN 4

- 3 He also saw his kindred in his kinsman
 who, while living, swarmed with worms and was destroyed.¹³⁸
 In the worm of this world he saw that of the world to come.¹³⁹
 The Just One cut off his arm with worms,¹⁴⁰
 and he went out armless to inform us that in battle
 [Julian] would be hewn down and not gain victory; he would be
 overthrown and not triumph.
- 4 He was his own flesh and blood; in him he was fully portrayed.
 With one visible name the two of them were imprinted,
 just as with one hidden demon they were possessed.
 His kinsman made a statement about him by his worms.
 In his other half he saw himself and what would befall him.
 In his death he saw his own killing, in his worm his own torment.¹⁴¹
- 5 On her lyre Error played; she captured these:
 Ahab with promises, this one with assurances.
 The prophets of the house of Baal, the possessed of the house of
 falsehood—
 in all of them a single chant resounded:
 to Ahab to go up,¹⁴² to this one to go down.¹⁴³
 Ahab went up and fell, and this one went down and was struck.
- 6 Who else has so increased altars?
 Who else has so honored all the evil spirits?
 Who else has so pleased all the demons?
 He angered only the One, and he was broken.

whey, useless except for curdling other milk, and the faithful Christians, the curds, kept to make the cheese. Unknowingly, then, Julian has performed a useful service for the church.

138. Julian's uncle Julian, Prefect of the Orient, is meant. As punishment for his persecution of Christians in Antioch after the destruction of the Temple of Apollo and especially for his defiling of the altar vessels (according to Sozomen) or of the altar (according to Theodoret), he was tormented by an intestinal disease; cf. Theod. HE 3.7–9 and Soz. HE 5.8.

139. Isa. 66.24, cited by Mark 9.48, associates the worm with fire as instruments of divine punishment. Only Sozomen's version of the events in Antioch includes worms in the punishment.

140. The *comites* or order of Imperial Companions had been created by Constantine. The office of *comes orientis* held by Julian became more permanent and had higher rank than others for reasons that are unknown; cf. Jones, Social and Economic History, I, 104f. Thus Julian, the *comes*, is the arm of the Emperor Julian, although there are more than two *comites*!

141. Julian and his uncle were kinsmen, had the same name and were both persecutors of Christians. This means that they shared in the same reality in a mysterious, symbolic sense. They are even two halves of the same person. Ephrem uses his technical language of typology here: *šwr*, "portray," *tḅ*, "imprint," *gly*, "visible" and *ky*, "hidden."

142. I.e., to Ramoth-gilead.

143. I.e., to Julian to go down to Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- In him was confuted the entire faction of wrong,
a force unable to support its worshippers.
- 7 The chief sorcerors, the best of the Chaldeans,
the most-skilled sons of error he chose lest
perhaps some of the ignorant¹⁴⁴ should fail to comprehend.
They labored everyday in everything;
they plunged into and researched the recesses of hidden matters.
Although they thought they understood, they found disgrace.
- 8 The Just One measured Saul¹⁴⁵ with his [own] measure;
since he consulted a conjured spirit, He cast gloom on him by it.
Listening, he heard from him a note that sickened his heart.¹⁴⁶
This one, too, who followed in his footsteps,
who loved Chaldeans—[God] surrendered him to the Chaldeans.¹⁴⁷
He worshipped the sun and fell before the servants of the sun.¹⁴⁸
- 9 Since he denied God Who can never be divided,
He surrendered him to Satan who can never be in agreement.¹⁴⁹
The errant one wandered and went down to destroy the errant ones.
He worshipped the sun, yet again he dishonored it
since he went down to kill its servants and worshippers.
This is the faction of Satan, which is entirely treacherous and
duplicitous.
- 10 If by the sun's power, therefore, he went down to conquer
those who for a long time had offered libations to the sun,

144. For the translation, "some of the ignorant," cf. Nöldeke, §209A.

145. There is a pun on "Saul," *šwl*, and "consulted," *šl*.

146. Saul's conjuring of the spirit of Samuel, cf. 1 Sam. 28.3–25, informed him of his own imminent defeat and death.

147. That is, since Julian loved astrologers, God surrendered him to the Persians. Ephrem plays on the two senses of "Chaldean."

148. Julian wrote a hymn to Helios for December 25, the celebration of Sol Invictus, probably at Antioch in 362; cf. Jul. Imp. Orat. 4, and Bowersock, Julian, 102f. The work shows Julian's contemplative religiosity, a fusion of Neo-Platonism and traditional religion with the sun taking the role of the Logos as metaphysical mediator between the One and the many, cf. *ibid.*, 103, and Malley, Hellenism, 182–87 et passim. Ephrem was himself capable of combining Christian belief with the imagery of Sol Invictus, cf. Nat. 27.

149. Cf. Mark 3.20–30 et par. The division of error as opposed to the unity of truth is a common rhetorical and apologetic device, which recurs below in CJ 4.13. Throughout this strophe Ephrem plays on the various senses of *šw*, "to be worthy, to agree," and of *ṯ*, "to wander, err," and of *plg*, "to divide, deceive," Ethp. "to have doubts."

HYMN 4

he himself would have prevailed over the sun [to which] he offered a libation.¹⁵⁰

Unwittingly he confuted the signs of the Zodiac,
for if he learned from them that he would go down to victory,
why did he not find out that he would go down to defeat?

- 11 If, then, while honoring the sun, he determined to march,
it escaped his notice that it was worshipped especially there.
If, moreover, the Chaldeans' home is in Babylon,
should he, a stranger, be exalted?¹⁵¹
For if he was confident in the error that befell him,
how much more confident in it would be his indigenous
predecessors!

- 12 If, moreover, he found out¹⁵² that he would march to victory
over those who had worthily offered libations to the sun,
he would dissipate his [own] faction: He was both honoring the sun
and unwittingly bringing reproach on it.
For if [the sun] rejected¹⁵³ the diligent [worshippers] of old,
it would show itself a tyrant, and in vain would he honor it.

- 13 The one divided against himself is the root
of the factions of the sons of the Evil One who are utterly in
disagreement.

For if two kings looked at the signs of the Zodiac,
the erring ones have dissipated their [own] argument.
For if by [these signs] this one learned he would be victorious,
from them also that one learned he would conquer!

- 14 If he and also they are worshippers of the sun,
if he and also they are gazers at auguries,
if he and also they are consulters of oracles,

150. That is, if Julian had defeated the Persians, he would have defeated his own god, the sun, since they had a longer history of sun worship than he did. But Julian's approach could be interpreted instead as a normal religious military strategy, the calling out of the gods from a city under siege, inviting them to join the gods of the attacker; cf. V. Basanoff, *Evocatio: Étude d'un rituel militaire romain*, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes Études, Sciences religieuses 61 (Paris, 1947). Here my translation differs from Beck's, "dann hat er sich selbst besiegt."

151. That is, since Babylonia is the source of astrology, the power behind astrology would favor the Persians rather than Julian. The emperor himself had addressed this issue in his *Hymn to King Helios*, arguing that the Greeks had perfected the astrology of Babylonia and hence presumably were the rightful heirs of its power, cf. Malley, *Hellenism*, 92f.

152. The Syriac adds "and learned."

153. Ephrem puns on *tlm*, "reject" and *tlwm*, "tyrant" in the following line.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

- it is the Evil One who is divided against himself.
 Their accursed instruction lies to its teachers.
 Their mad learning speaks falsely to its proclaimers.
- 15 For behold the son of the king,¹⁵⁴ a sea of calm,
 was inexhaustible, but he never proclaimed he would be victorious.
 He knew this was the hidden concern of the [Most] High.
 His diadem he entrusted to the Omniscient One.
 If he were not victorious and triumphant, all the more was he
 victorious and triumphant
 whose prayer for forty years preserved his kingdom.¹⁵⁵
- 16 He was a cedar that in his time bent quietly
 and fell into his couch and, resting, fell asleep in peace.
 From their sweet root there emerged in succession
 the sapling of paganism,¹⁵⁶ who, it was supposed,
 would live long and weary mountains in his shadow.
 Overnight he sprouted, and overnight he dried up.
- 17 Instead of Jonah's [head], the sun beat down on the heads
 of [Julian's] accursed partisans—the discriminating sun
 that refreshed the true but tormented the infidels.
 For if Jonah suffered because he stood
 against the penitents, how much more afflicted would be
 everyone who fights against the saints.¹⁵⁷
- 18 At that time terrors¹⁵⁸ were stirred up as a rebuke;¹⁵⁹

154. Emperor Constantius.

155. Although Constantius had no decisive victory on the Eastern front, at least, Ephrem claims, he neither predicted a great victory nor experienced a resounding defeat. His rule lasted approximately 40 years, as *caesar* from 324–37 and *augustus* from 337–63; cf. Boak and Sinnigen, 438, and R. MacMullen, *Constantine* (London, 1969), 142f., 217–20, Pl. XI, XII.

156. From the “sweet root” of Constantine and his son Constantius emerged the apostate “sapling,” Julian, Constantine’s nephew.

157. Cf. Jonah 4.8–11. Ephrem uses the plant that sprouted and under which Jonah rested as a symbol of Julian’s brief glory. With it he frames a *qal w boher* exegetical argument (cf. Nat. 1.57 and note ad loc.): If God afflicted Jonah for the sake of the penitents of Nineveh, how much more will he afflict Julian, the persecutor of the saints. For further reflections on Jonah, cf. Virg. 42–50.

158. The Syriac word *qwnh'* normally means the terror caused by an earthquake. It should be plural to agree with the verb, as per Beck’s translation but not his text. According to some ancient sources the attempt to rebuild the Temple was thwarted by one or several earthquakes; cf. Amm. Mar. 23.1.2–3. For discussion of the historicity of these events, cf. Brock, Temple, (which includes a translation of CJ 4.18–23, p. 283f.), Bowersock, Julian, 88–90, 120–22, and Levenson, Attempt.

159. The Syriac here is translated as the Afel infinitive of *ksr* “to rebuke, confute.” Alternatively it may be the Pael infinitive of *nksr* “to put to death”—hence “deadly terrors were stirred up.”

HYMN 4

He¹⁶⁰ proclaimed in the whole world a truth for souls:
that cities were overthrown by the disgrace of paganism.¹⁶¹
Jerusalem found very guilty
the accursed ones and crucifiers who dared to decide to enter¹⁶²
to build the desolate place desolated by their sins.¹⁶³

- 19 Fools and simpletons, they desolated what had been built,
and now that it has been desolated, they decide to build it.
When they possessed it, they demolished it, but when it was
desolate, they loved it.

Jerusalem trembled when she saw
her demolishers entering again and disturbing her calm.
She complained to the [Most] High about them, and she was heard.

- 20 Winds He commanded, and they blew; He beckoned to
earthquakes, and they came into being,
to the lightning bolts and they blazed forth, to the air and it became
dark,
to the walls and they were overthrown, to the gates and they were
opened.

Fire came out and devoured the scribes
who read in Daniel that [Jerusalem] would be destroyed forever,
who read but did not learn; they were severely stricken, and they
learned.¹⁶⁴

- 21 They scattered her with the Humble One¹⁶⁵ Who gathered her
chicks,¹⁶⁶
and they thought the soothsayer's error would gather her.
They overthrew her with the steadfast,¹⁶⁷ but supported her with
the unsteady.

They wanted to build her again.

160. If the terrors are plural, God rather than the events must be understood to be the subject here.

161. The preposition may express the agent with the passive verb, as translated here, or it may indicate purpose: "for the disgrace of paganism."

162. Or "to threaten to enter." Especially if the latter is the correct translation, Ephrem does not indicate clearly whether or not the work had begun.

163. Ephrem repeats the Christian anti-Jewish τόπος that the destruction of the Temple was a divine punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Christ.

164. Cf. CJ 1.20.5 and note ad loc.

165. Matt. 21.5, quoting Zech. 9.9, at the entry into Jerusalem.

166. Matt. 23.37.

167. Although the received text is plural, Beck takes this as singular and refers it to Christ.

HYMNS AGAINST JULIAN

They scattered His¹⁶⁸ great altar by the slaughter of the Holy One, and they thought the rebuilder of [pagan] altars¹⁶⁹ would reestablish it.

- 22 They broke her by the wood¹⁷⁰ of the Living Architect,¹⁷¹ but they sustained her by the broken reed of paganism.¹⁷² They disheartened her with Zechariah¹⁷³ who had made her rejoice, "Behold your king!"

But they encouraged her with the diviner of the madman.

They announced to her, "Behold there comes one possessed who will build you.

He will enter to offer sacrifice in you, to pour libations to his demons in you."

- 23 But Daniel passed judgment on Jerusalem and determined that it would not be rebuilt, and Zion believed him. They themselves wailed¹⁷⁴ and wept: he cut off and cast out their hope.

Cana by its wine consoled

the two wailers and gave them advice,

"Do not reject by your wailings the rewards of the Gracious One.

- 24 "Behold, you are at rest; you are at peace, then, and freed from demonic things and contact with evil spirits. They became confused and raved and crucified the Reviver of all, and they have always torn to pieces the two of you. In you they killed the prophets; in you they multiplied idols. With the image of four faces¹⁷⁵ they put your faces to shame.

168. *Sic*—referring to the Holy One, but Beck translates it as feminine, referring to Jerusalem.

169. As in CJ 2.2, the altar of the Temple, *mdbh'*, is contrasted with pagan altars, *'lt'*, built by Julian.

170. The Syriac *qys'* here clearly refers to the cross, but Ephrem likes the ambiguity of the word, which may also mean "tree" or simply "wood."

171. On Christ the Architect, cf. Nat. 3.15 and 8.10 and notes ad loc.

172. 2 Kgs. 18.21.

173. The pun on "Zechariah," *zkry'*, and "his diviner," *zkwrb*, (in the following line) helps to set out the parallelism—and hence Ephrem's irony—between the announcement of the prophet and that of Julian's diviner.

174. Although the *seyame* are missing, the form and context demand the feminine plural; the understood subject is Jerusalem and Zion.

175. Cf. 2 Chron. 33.7 in the Pes., where Manasseh put a four-faced image of the golden calf in the Temple, cf. HdF 87.4.3, SdF 3.357 and Beck's remarks ad loc. The 3rd pl. masc. subject may be either the "demonic things" and "evil spirits" or the "scribes" of strophes 21ff.

HYMN 4

- 25 "Better for you than that inhabited land of paganism
is the wasteland without sins and the desert without oracles,
Bethlehem and Bethany both pledged to [you] two
that instead of that People that was uprooted
from all the peoples they should come with Hallelujahs
to see in your wombs the grave and Golgotha."¹⁷⁶
- 26 Who will again believe in Fate and the horoscope?
Who will again trust soothsayers and conjured spirits?
Who will again err with divinations and signs of the Zodiac?
For behold all of them have lied in all things.
So that the Just One [need] not persuade those in error one by one,
He broke that one who erred that they might learn by him.¹⁷⁷

176. Ephrem is an early witness to Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land; cf. Nat. 19.14–16, Virg. 16–23 and 32–36.

177. B. M. Add. 14571 adds, "Completed are the five hymns about King Julian, the pagan."

The Hymns on Virginity and on the Symbols of the Lord¹

1. Although the superscript of the principal manuscript entitles this collection simply "Hymns on Virginity of Saint Ephrem," a postscript gives this fuller title. I have used it here since it is a better description of the contents of this collection of fifty-two hymns.

1

In this, the first of three hymns on the theme of virginity, Ephrem begins with the image of the body as garment and exhorts the virgin to put off the garment of the old, pre-baptismal self (str. 1). The body of the baptized is a temple and palace built by the Carpenter of life (str. 2). Enunciating the central theme of the collection of hymns, Ephrem states that scripture and nature serve as guides for the Christian life (str. 3–5). The next few strophes are an exhortation to avoid both extremes of asceticism and opposition to virginity (str. 6–8). Finally, the dangers threatening the virgin are the subject of the last strophes. The danger of rape is mitigated by the power of the will to resist (str. 9). More perilous are the dangers of wine (str. 10–11) and especially of love (str. 12–14). The description of the power of infatuation, despite Ephrem's intent, is charming.

1

To the melody: "The royal bride"

- 1 O body, strip off the utterly hateful old man,
lest he wear out again the new [garment] you put on when you were
baptized.²

For it would be the inverse of paying his due
that he, if renewed, should wear you out again.

O body, obey my advice; strip him off by [your] way of life,
lest he put you on by [his] habits.

*Refrain: From all the chaste³ on earth and in heaven,
glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.*

2. Col. 3.9.

3. The Syriac word, *qdyšyn*, can mean "holy" but is most often used as a technical term for celibates or for married couples living chastely; cf. Murray, Symbols, 12–16.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 2 For by baptism our Lord made new your old age—
 He, the Carpenter⁴ of life, Who by His blood formed and built a
 temple⁵ for His dwelling.
 Do not allow that old man
 to dwell in the renewed temple.
 O body, if you have God live in your Temple,
 you will also become His royal palace.⁶
- 3 Scripture that teaches, nature that proclaims: both admonish man.
 Set between the two is his iniquity,
 so that nature admonishes him if he lead to sin one without the Law,
 and scripture will rebuke him if he lead to sin one of the Law.⁷
 Satan wounds, but they heal us:
 compunction of soul enters on the heel of iniquity.
- 4 They scorned the rebellious, mended the penitent and judged the
 judge.
 Again, they will reprove rebels but heal the penitent.
 For they endure with the Evil One who is
 young in every generation and accompanies everyone and does harm
 at every moment.
 They also accompany everyone and are young
 in each generation and found in every moment.
- 5 Listen to nature and the Law, relating [man's] evil corruptions, for
 that People committed adultery with the Law;
 without the Law the peoples changed their natures
 and without nature they have become new.
 Nature and Law have complained against [man]
 that the seditious have perverted their ordinance.⁸

4. Elsewhere Ephrem uses the image of the architect, but here the word is clearly carpenter.

5. The Syriac word is from the Greek *ναός*. For a similar idea, cf. Clem. str. 7.

6. The Syriac word, *hykl'*, is a cognate of the Hebrew, hence perhaps is related to Jewish "Hekhaloth" mysticism, cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 45–79, 356–68 et passim.

7. Jews have the Law via scripture; Gentiles have "natural law." Although Ephrem does not use this term, the concept is implied here.

8. Beck takes the referent in the first line to be the people, i.e., the Jewish people, rather than humankind. In this context, however, it seems more appropriate to understand the universal human need for redemption: the Law complains against the Jews who were to follow it; nature complains against the Gentiles who were to follow natural law through their consciences.

HYMN 1

- 6 The Evil One stole the weak from marriage in the name of
conversion,⁹
and when they were in the midst, he placed behind them the
disgrace of the offense,
and before them he again placed beauty
that is a snare of hateful desire.
Ashamed to assume the condition of marriage,
they fell into the snares of sin.
- 7 O body, why do you persecute virginity that came down to earth¹⁰
and lives with us as a sojourner; if one pursues her and uproots her
nest,
because she is not able to rebuild it,
her wing quickly carries her to the height—
this bird on high who grows old in one nest—
but if she departs, she leaves [the nest] forever.¹¹
- 8 When the dear friend of Watchers¹² takes flight, the companion of
demons enters:
desire, which is the hatred of the virginity pursued by Joseph.
For virginity loved the Watchers;
she flees to ascend the height of the Watchers.
Who will not weep because instead of this quiet one,
this inflamed one¹³ entered and lived there?
- 9 If a robber seizes you and you are raped¹⁴ in the field,
the unclean man's force will be persuasive evidence¹⁵ that you are
chaste
just as Sarah in the bosom of Pharaoh was chaste,
for she did not commit adultery by her own will.¹⁶

9. An anti-encratite section—a Christian group recommending celibacy, apparently otherwise orthodox, is criticized for causing some to fall into sin by forbidding marriage. This could be the remnants of the earliest Syriac-speaking Christian community.

10. Literally, "to our place."

11. That is, either one must remain celibate for a lifetime or abandon that vocation. Ephrem argues again here against the earlier tradition of encratism.

12. The "Watchers," as before, are angels. Their "dear friend" is virginity, since the celibate life was seen as the angelic life, cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellung*, 49f., 157–61.

13. Ephrem puns on "quiet one," *mšynt'*, and "inflamed one," *mšhnt'*, virginity and desire, respectively.

14. Literally, "your modesty is exposed."

15. Literally, "will persuade concerning you."

16. Gen. 12. 10–20.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

The will has become a priest who by his hyssop
purifies those who have been defiled by force.

- 10 Fear wine that exposed the honorable Noah, victorious in his
generation.¹⁷

A handful of wine prevailed over him who could prevail over the
flood of water.

This one whom the Deluge had not vanquished outwardly,
wine vanquished inwardly.

The wine that exposed [and] cast down Noah, the head of families—
how much more will it conquer you, solitary woman!¹⁸

- 11 May you fear¹⁹ the desire of wine that took Lot by force in old
age.²⁰

Wine accomplished difficult things so that by it women stole
conception.

How much more will it accomplish this easy thing:
that men by it steal the signs of virginity.

The girls pillaged the treasure of the old man;
you keep your treasury from the young [men].

- 12 One drunk on wine is more tolerable than one drunk on hateful
love.

Firm bonds enfeeble him; despised is his sceptre and weak [his] staff.

Chastisement and reproof

traverse his ears like fables,

and to him as well reproach is like pleasure,

and spittle in the face he reckons as dew.

- 13 For the path of the voices that batter his ears does not lead to his
heart.

The gates of his ears are open one to the other: A word that entered
by his [one] ear

went out on the opposite [side] by the other ear.

While his teacher supposes that he is listening to him,

he does not perceive that his warning is pouring forth outside,

because there is no place in his heart to receive [it].

17. Literally, "Noah, who prevailed" or "conquered." The same word appears twice in the following line. Gen. 9.20–27. Cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 207–10.

18. Ephrem uses the *gal w homer* type of rabbinic exegesis here.

19. The syntax here is unclear; there is some textual uncertainty.

20. Gen. 19. 30–38.

HYMN 1

- 14 For full and congested and cramped is the spacious gulf²¹ of his
reason
from one drop of the love that surged and became a great sea.
Thoughts plunge in and arise
like a sailor whose ship is wrecked.
Thought is afloat in waves of desires
like a ship whose navigator has abandoned it.

21. or "womb."

2

In this second hymn on the theme of virginity, Ephrem adduces women from Jewish scripture to illustrate his argument. The first nine strophes are a meditation on the treasure of virginity and the inevitability of the punishment of its thief. He begins with the recollection of Amnon's rape of Tamar, vividly describing his desire and deceitful plan (str. 1–3) and Tamar's despair (str. 4–5). The punishment not only of Amnon but also of Shechem illustrate the fate of the destroyers of virginity (str. 6–9). In a more positive vein, though straying farther from the intent of the original story, he finds examples of heroically chaste women in Jephthah's daughter and in Susanna (str. 10–15). Ignoring the fact that his emphasis on permanent virginity as a positive value is utterly foreign to the story of Jephthah's daughter, he takes her as a model for chaste women and even as a type of Christ (str. 10–11, esp. 11.3–6). She and Susanna serve as models for chastity among virgins and married women, respectively (str. 12). The final strophes constitute an explicit exhortation to women to persevere and to be thoroughgoing in their chastity (str. 13–15).

2

The same melody

- 1 In a lamb's garment the crafty Amnon approached that ewe.²²
Scheming to lead her astray by her service,²³ he performed his
service.

The sick one, laid low, rose to the conflict
and laid hold of the crown that was found for his shame.
Since he saw that virginity was secure in her nest,
he dissembled to make her enter his den, and so he caught her.

22. Cf. 2 Sam. 13.1–22.

23. This word, *dyl'* is apparently from *dwl*, to serve or minister, in Pael.

HYMN 2

Refrain: From all the chaste, glory to the Chaste One Who gave virginity among the Gentiles.

- 2 Crafty is your hunger, O virgin, but you are innocent, since Amnon
 who sought you
 was seeking food—the astute one, who was not [really] seeking.
 By the meal for which he did not hunger, he served the desire of the
 flesh,
 for which he did hunger.
 O the deceiver who sought something that he does not really seek
 so that by means of it he might find what he seeks!
- 3 Hearts he was seeking—O the rational one²⁴ who made hearts for
 the heartless one!
 For he was a snake who in his cunning
 clothed himself in the attire of illness,
 so that she would fail to notice him, and he would wound her.
 Since desire deceived and defiled virginity,
 rage deceived and destroyed desire.
- 4 Tamar tore her garments when she saw her pearl had perished.
 Instead of her tunic she could acquire another,
 but her virginity did not have a successor,
 because it is not able, if stolen, to be sought out again.
 O you, virginity, your destruction is simple for all,
 but your restoration is easy only for the Lord of all.
- 5 Tamar feared to be silent, but she was also ashamed to speak.
 Since she was able neither to be silent nor to speak,
 she tore her garments so the visible shreds
 would cry out in silence that her hidden signs of virginity were
 stolen.
 The multitude of pearls on her did not console her
 about that one greatest [pearl].
- 6 The king's daughter was a maiden whose limbs bore many beryls,
 but her virginity, although [only] one, surpassed them all.
 Therefore the defiled one despised the beryls but ploughed the seals;
 he rejected the stones but stole the signs of virginity.

24. I.e., virginity.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

The thief knows your value, virginity,
but you are not aware how much you are worth!

- 7 This athlete, seeing he could not lay her low by standing firm,
hastened to fall and lay her low.²⁵

He broke the yoke of marriage and committed adultery;²⁶
the iniquity he sowed in the inner chamber, he reaped in the open
field.

The sword destroyed him who destroyed virginity.
and he who spattered him[self] with her blood, bathed in his
blood.²⁷

- 8 In the inner chamber and in the wilderness they lie in wait, O
virginity,
so that if you entered the inner chamber, the crafty Amnon stole
your riches.

[If] you went out to the field, [if] you resisted in the desert,
Shechem the thief stole your treasure.²⁸

Where, indeed, will you go, solitary dove,
whose hunters are numerous everywhere?

- 9 Venerable one, your hunters²⁹ are hunted in return,
since the defiled Shechem, who met you in the wilderness and took
you captive, was killed in his house,
and Amnon, too, who lay in wait in the inner chamber and caught
you,
was dragged away into the field.

Your destroyers were destroyed and were hunted; in them is a type
that whoever destroys you will be destroyed.

- 10 Jephthah's daughter bowed her neck to the sword;
her pearl, delivered from all dangers, remained with her and
consolated her.³⁰

25. Literally, "He was an athlete who, although he saw that however much he stood firm, he could not lay [her] low, but he hastened and fell and laid her low."

26. Tamar asked Amnon to marry her after the rape, but he refused.

27. Amnon's death is punishment for his crime, which is in Ephrem's eyes more a crime against virginity than against Tamar!

28. The allusion here is to the rape of Dinah, cf. Gen. 34.

29. The Syriac adds redundantly, "who hunted you."

30. Judg. 11. 29-40. Ephrem misses the point of the story of Jephthah's promise to Yahweh to offer the first person he saw as a holocaust when he returned home if he received victory over the Ammonites. The first he saw was his daughter, his only child. She accepted death willingly after being allowed two months in the wilderness to "mourn her virginity."

HYMN 2

- But distress will be the companion in death
of the woman whose pearl perishes here.
Again on the day of resurrection there will be fear
before that Judge, [even] when she has repented.
- 11 Jephthah's daughter willed to die to fulfill her father's vow.³¹
Do not annul by your eyes the vows of virginity your mouth has
vowed.³²
- Jephthah poured out his daughter's blood,
but your Bridegroom shed His blood for love of you.
Therefore that Only-Begotten blood bought
that blood by which your gate is sealed.³³
- 12 A married woman willed to die to put an end to adultery.³⁴
A virgin died to fulfill her father's vow.
A married³⁵ mother of offspring willed to die
lest she receive a stolen seed whose sowing is cursed.
The Virgin will not steal a defiled seed in secret
lest the pure Infant inside her be a lawless one.³⁶
- 13 Chaste woman, do not complete your course in the trackless waste
of desires,
lest your enemy then work in you, take your power and discharge
your wellspring.
lest your old age come to shame,
lest your hateful way of life be reproached.
Your way of life made light of youth in the contest,
so that the crown might adorn your old age.
- 14 For when one ages and becomes ugly, the chaste ways of youth
come to mind;

31. The Syriac is passive here and in the following strophe, Virg. 2.12.2.

32. Beck suggests that discipline of the eyes to preserve chastity is meant here; cf. Eccl. 33.1. If so, it recalls the story of Ephrem's rebuke of a woman who stared at him, Soz. E.H. 3.16. On the probable lack of historical value of the story, cf. Outtier, Saint Éphrem, 21.

33. Only-Begotten, a title used often for Christ, has a special nuance in Syriac. It means a solitary one and is a technical term for a person who has chosen an ascetic life in imitation of Christ; cf. Murray, Exhortation. Ephrem's graphic imagery here is startling to modern ears. He addresses consecrated virgins here; Beck has noted similar imagery in CH 47.1, Nat. 14.12, Virg. 3.14.

34. Susannah, cf. Dan. 13.43.

35. Since the Syriac reads "of marriage", *dšwtptwt*, not *dšwtpt*, it is here translated as "married." Again, Susannah is meant.

36. Here Ephrem seems to be concerned with polemics against the virgin birth, cf. Nat. 5-20.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

they abhor his old age because of its infirmity,
but they cherish the infirmities of the body
who see that the adornments of the spirit are hidden in the soul.

O virginity, portray with your senses your glories
that you might be honored by them when you are old.

15 Let chastity be portrayed in your eyes and in your ears the sound of
truth.

Imprint your tongue with the word of life and upon your hands
[imprint] all alms.

Stamp your footsteps with visiting the sick,
and let the image of your Lord be portrayed in your heart.

Tablets are honored because of the image of kings.

How much [more will] one [be honored] who portrayed his Lord in
all his senses.³⁷

37. The language of art and coinage is frequently used by Ephrem, cf. Nat. 1.99. Here the image of God is imprinted on all the senses through pious actions.

3

In this third hymn on the theme of virginity, Ephrem urges the consecrated virgin to cultivate modesty. After a warning on the fleeting nature of youthful beauty, he enlarges on the dangers of sexual temptation (str. 1–7). The kiss of Judas is a warning, as is the devouring nature of fire that death hides beneath the deceptive allure of sexual desire (str. 5, 7). Exercise of the will and a constant disposition to repentance are necessary for one betrothed to Christ (str. 8–16).

3

The same melody

- 1 Youth resembles a branch of fruit, pleasing in summer.
When its fruits are stripped away, it is thrown away,
and everyone turns his face away from it,
and what was found desirable to all [becomes] ugly to everyone.
Girl, do not show your beauty to outsiders,
so that when it has been disfigured, onlookers would scorn it.

*Refrain: From each who has struggled and held fast to virginity, to You, Lord, and to
Your Anointed be praise!*

- 2 How swift, O virginity, are your wings that reach your Lord.
Flee from the advice of your enemy whose capital disconcerts the
merchants.
He impoverished the treasures of great Adam³⁸
who did business with the cargo of harms.
Do not borrow from the one who lends and does not demand,
for if you repay his money you would make him poor.

38. On the original attributes of Adam, cf. Nat. 5.4 and note ad loc.; also Virg. 16.9, 29.11, 48.15, 51.7.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 3 Great fear and shame accompany his desires;
they are troublesome and sadden for a lifetime those who enact
them.
But open and pure are the faces
of those who are chaste, who are weaned from all desires.
Be not seized, O body, by hateful love;
although its doing is dead, the thought of it is living.
- 4 For his teaching is cunning, so that he may be with everyone and
like everyone.
His gift is poured forth for the good; he bribes the belly and is
bribed by it,
so that the eye will look away and the mouth will be silent,
and the ear will pass over its hateful news.
His silent wine is endowed with speech by its drinkers.
It sings with their voices instead of its master's.
- 5 Beforehand in his cunning he placed at the mouth of his trap food
for the prey.
For his love precedes his hate, like Judas who kissed and killed.
For the Pure One kissed the unclean Judas
to denounce the Evil One in Judas:
Even if his enticements are sweet like the kiss of Judas,
death is secretly woven into them.
- 6 He is the one who, if he arises in you, is able to repay you [with] a
fall,
so that when he has stood up, he will cast you down, for his desire
is dead, my beloved,
but your flesh is able to revive and vivify it.
When it lives in [your flesh], it kills [the flesh] in return.
O body, if you give life to its death,
there will be death for your life.
- 7 Let fire be an example for you
since it is buried in wood and is dead,
but the friction of [one piece of] wood with another revives[fire] for
the perishing of both.
Having revived, it returns to ignite by contact the substance that
revived it.
O the type: That wood becomes a grave for fire,
and when [fire] is awakened from [wood], [the fire] is consumed with it.

HYMN 3

- 8 For our freedom is like ■ soul for desires, and by it they live,
but if it sheds them, it is as if they were dead.
Therefore [our freedom] is self-governing since by its will debts
stand,
and by its will sins fall.
It is like the Heavenly One Whose power contains the universe,
and if He retracted it, all would fall.
- 9 Therefore our Judge is very just, since He does not immediately
demand our debts;
because of this comes remorse,
so that if one repent, it blots out his evil-doing.
But if he rebel, it takes from him his defense.
On that account remorse appears with all sins.
in order to bear witness to the law court.
- 10 Acquire repentance that persists and not momentary remorse,
for repentance heals our bruises by its constancy,
but remorse has this [character]
that builds up and tears down pains momentarily.
Body, if you are accustomed to repent and to sin again,
the seal of your letter of bondage is remorse.
- 11 O eye, beware of stealing the beauty in which are hidden the flaws
of old age.
For a maiden's limbs bear a pleasing sight,
but old age rebukes them.
For a feigned beauty inhabited them;
although it inhabits and dwells in the face of youth, it is beauty
that [soon] departs and flees from it.
- 12 Your pearl, too is quickly lost from the presence of two thieves;
for it belongs to solitary merchants, and if they are defiled, both lost
the greatest of all treasures.
But the fool hands it to the thief.
O pearl that is lost by its possessor
nor does it remain in the treasury of the thief!³⁹
- 13 If a virgin is dishonored in the open field, Moses petitions for her

39. The sense seems to be that the virgin who willingly yields the pearl of virginity becomes ■ thief along with the one who steals it. Yet, having stolen it together, ironically, both have lost it.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

that the maiden shouted and cried out and there was no help.⁴⁰

Who will petition on your behalf, O virgin,
who are peacefully taken captive⁴¹ and are silent?

Let you not give yourself to captivity peacefully
lest peace judge you in the law court.

- 14 It is written that if a husband renounces his wife, her father should
bring out her proof of virginity,

but since your Betrothed is the High One Who sees in secret,
show the hidden proof of virginity in secret to your hidden Lord—
not on your cloth⁴² but on your body.

Rejected women show proof of virginity on a cloth;
let you show your proof of virginity to your Betrothed.

- 15 Will you lose your Betrothed and acquire instead of Him a false
betrothed

that you may console yourself, saying, "Even if I lost [one] still I
found [another]."

Because his love lies and is deceitful and dwells upon all,
he is not able to be your companion.

Then your remorse will increase,
when you are left bereft on both sides.

- 16 By the true [Betrothed] you have been left because you left him,
but that lying one gave up and left you and made you go astray
among the ways.

So now where will you turn you gaze?

A dove uprooted her nest and went out in desire of the serpent.

May you not discover Eve's discovery!⁴³

[Instead] will you discover remorse in her?

40. That is, she is given the benefit of the doubt since no one would have heard if she did cry out; cf. Deut. 22.25-27.

41. P'al in the text, but apparently in the sense of the Ethp., as Beck notes.

42. The same word is used in Matt. 14.12.

43. Ephrem puns on *ḥwy'*, "serpent," and *ḥw'*, "Eve," as well as on various words formed on the root *ʕh*, "to find."

4

Through the theme of baptismal anointing the three hymns on virginity are linked to the following sub-collection of four hymns, "On oil, the olive and the symbols of the Lord." These four hymns provide a good illustration of the way in which Ephrem intertwines the various types of symbols: linguistic, scriptural, natural and sacramental. Here he plays on the notion of Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah, whose presence and significance is anticipated in nature by the oil of the olive with its many uses—most notably its healing properties and its use in providing fuel for lamps; these symbolize Christ the Physician and the Light. Likewise, the anointed ones of scripture, the priests, prophets and kings, and the healers of both the Old and New Testament find their meaning and their power in Christ. In the baptismal anointing the Christian enters into this rich symbolic system, being sealed with the signet that is Christ.

At the start of this first hymn Ephrem prepares us for the wealth of symbolism he is about to evoke by painting a vivid picture of the wealth of a merchant brought into harbor (str. 1–4). But the focus of this hymn is on oil as a healing and restorative substance: Just as the oil of the olive gives life to the body through its healing properties, it gives life to the mind by its symbolism (str. 3). Not only the healings recounted in the New Testament, but also those of the Old Testament found their source in Christ, the Anointed One, Whose name intimates to us the connection with oil (str. 4–8). The natural restorative properties of oil are indicative of the spiritually restorative character of the sacraments, especially baptism (str. 9–14). He closes the hymn with a characteristic rhetorical apology for his hymnological efforts (str. 15–16).

4

To the melody, "I shall open my mouth with knowledge"

- 1 Open for us, my Lord, the gate of Your treasure, You Whose wealth eagerly desires the needy

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

that it might increase the minds of speakers as [if they were]
merchants.

For Your silver increases and lends on interest; it is the merchant of
its merchants.

In Your talent are gathered the riches of the treasure of life.

Profitable is the abundance of Your silver that goes out after profit:
the mina increases tenfold, and the talent by five times.⁴⁴

*Refrain: Glory to the Anointed Who rose and enlightened the symbols that were
veiled.*

- 2 Let [my] mouth have Your teaching, my Lord, as a merchant [has]
capital,

for on [Your teaching] depend all forms of wisdom and from the
olive a treasury of symbols.⁴⁵

Let my tongue do business with its riches; let my word be a snare
for it;

let me enclose in it his hidden symbols as in the depth.

Let me gather them for nourishment of the ear that hungers for
secrets.

For Your net gathered enough for the mouth that hungers for
revelations.

- 3 My gaze succumbed and was conquered by its beauties that gave a
glimpse [and] gazed into the treasure-house
of the olive tree in which His symbols rest: as its oil the Light
entered

and it bore His types as fruits. And who is able to pluck the fruit,
hidden and revealed, of this glorious tree that bears
openly the fruits and leaves and secretly the symbols and types,
and it gives life to the body with its visible things and to the mind
with its secrets?

- 4 For in its oil is a likeness to the sea and by it helps flow
to the limbs as to a harbor to give healings there.
Even the disciples, merchants of all helps, succeeded by them—
they who with the Healing Spirit went away to the sick.⁴⁶

44. Cf. Luke 19.16–18 and Matt. 25.16. 6 obols = 1 denarius, 100 denarii = 1 mina, 60 minas = 1 talent.

45. A pun here on *u'*, "to hang down, to depend."

46. Cf. Matt. 10.1 and Luke 10.8–9.

HYMN 4

Within the oil flowed their words, ships full of helps,
and they entered [and] their healings were sufficient within bodies,
harbors of the sick.

- 5 Oil gave itself to the sick⁴⁷ that they might gain by it all helps,
as the Anointed Who gave Himself to gain by Him all glories.
The Anointed is One and Only-begotten, but He has many names
that mix with all titles all helps.

Oil also, although one, receives many names
that are compounded with all herbs for the healing of all ills.

- 6 For oil is rich in strategems and is able to be all with all
so that with powerful herbs it is harsh although it is mild,
and with ablution and cooling it becomes cold, although it is warm,
like the Anointed Who is all with all, so that for doubters
He is powerful, although He is merciful, and with worshippers He
is sweet.

He resembles each in everything, although He resembles His Father
alone.⁴⁸

- 7 The name of oil,⁴⁹ therefore, is like a symbol, and in it is portrayed
the name of the Anointed.

The name of oil was crowned for it is the shadow of the name of
the Anointed One.

For also that Master of the disciples accompanied them when they
were sent out,

and when they anointed and healed by oil,⁵⁰
the Anointed was portrayed in secret, and He persecuted all ills,
as on the hem of the garment⁵¹ the flow of blood saw Him and dried
up.

47. Especially in this stanza, Ephrem plays on *mšh'* and *mšyh'*, "oil" or "ointment" and "Anointed One, Messiah," respectively.

48. In this and in the previous stanza, Ephrem implicitly uses the Middle Platonic notion of *epinoiai* to show the availability of Christ to all at a level appropriate to each. Yet in this final line he counterpoises a Nicene emphasis on His full divinity—characteristically allowing the tension between the two concepts to stand without comment.

49. Throughout these hymns, the Syriac *mšh'* has been translated "oil" but it could be rendered "ointment" to replicate the word play of the original.

50. As Beck notes, Luke 10.9 is combined with Jas. 5.14.

51. Syriac *pylwn'* (more commonly *pyn'*) is for Greek φελόνιον (more commonly φαινώλης), "a cloak," cf. Margoliouth 444A. As Beck notes, Ephrem himself and VS have *mrṭwṭ'* instead at Matt. 9.20 (Luke 8.44). Cf. Mark 5.25 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 8 The name of oil indeed is His symbol and the shadow of the name,
the Anointed.
The shadow of His name indeed fell upon their sick, and they were
cured,
as the shadow of Simon fell upon the ailing, and they recovered.⁵²
The shadow of His name is like His pledge He gave to His apostles
that their shadow was going to heal. Elisha stretched out⁵³ his body
upon the boy when he brought him to life, but Simon [stretched out
merely] his shadow.
- 9 Oil filled the place of lineage for strangers whom it accompanied.
On the road it gave rest to their weariness;⁵⁴ in vexation it bandaged
their heads,
as our Lord refreshed in every place the afflicted who accompanied
Him.
In sleep oil stole the fatigue of sleeping bodies,
and while it anointed, in baptism it stole sin.
The weariness of sleeping bodies it stole; the sins of waking bodies
it stole.
- 10 Oil is the sceptre for old age and the armor for youth.
It supports sickness and is the bulwark of health.
It is one, but it is many in its uses: it gives chrism for altars,
and they bear the offering of reconciliation. Who will be sufficient
for this
which is extended to the evil as to the good, and soothes the
oppressed⁵⁵ as the just,
which, like its Lord, has opened its treasure-house to carry from it
every help?
- 11 An abundance is oil with which sinners do business: the forgiveness
of sins.
By oil the Anointed forgave the sins of the sinner who anointed [his]
feet.⁵⁶

52. Cf. Acts 5.14–16.

53. 2 Kgs. 4.34. Ephrem discovers yet another pun here, *mšḥ*, “to stretch out,” as an accompaniment to his use of the same root in the sense “to anoint.”

54. The Syriac is plural.

55. The sense would suggest “oppressor” rather than “oppressed,” but the Syriac is passive.

56. Mark 14.3–9 et par. As usual, Ephrem identifies the sinful woman as Mary, presumably Mary Magdalen.

HYMN 4

With [oil] Mary poured out her sin upon the head of the Lord⁵⁷ of
her sins.

It wafted its scent; it tested the reclining as in a furnace:
it exposed the theft clothed in the care of the poor.⁵⁸

It became the bridge to the remembrance of Mary to pass on her
glory from generation to generation.⁵⁹

- 12 In its flowings is hidden joy for oil does indeed gladden the face.
It brings its shoulder to all burdens in rejoicing and grieving with
everyone:

for it serves joy, yet it is obeyed by gloom,
for faces joyful of life by it are resplendent,
and the gloomy face of death with it is prepared for burial and dies.
. . . who mourn as our Lord [mourned] for Lazarus.⁶⁰

- 13 The force of oil like [that] of the Anointed chases away the iciness in
the body
that maddens and removes help so that this suffering is even a
second demon.

Strong is the power against diseases of oil that soothes the limbs,
like its Lord who soothes bodies and punishes demons.
He took pity on the man; He oppressed the legion; He persecuted
the fierce demons

who had made fierce the man on whom grace took pity.⁶¹

- 14 The river of Eden is divided in four directions in a symbol,⁶²
and the flowing of oil is divided in the churches in a glorious
symbol.

That one waters the Garden of Eden; this one enlightens the holy
church.

That one gladdens trees, and this one bodies.

That one of Eden has four names, the heralds of rivers,
and oil has three names, the trumpets of baptism.⁶³

57. Beck's text (erroneously?) has a plural here.

58. Ephrem has in mind the Johannine account of the anointing at Bethany. The story occurs in all four gospels, cf. Mark 14.3–9 et par., but Luke omits the complaint about wasting money that should be given to the poor and Jesus' reply. Only John attributes the complaint to Judas and attributes it to his own thievery from the common purse.

59. Mark. 14.9 et par.

60. Cf. John 11.35.

61. Cf. Mark 5.1–20 et par.

62. Gen. 2.10–14.

63. The divine names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are meant.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 15 My feeble tongue has made bold and has defiled the riches of
majesty.

It was not that it was able to give; the recipients are worthy to take.
For the source did not give the desirable treasure that is in it;
as a steward it distributes streams for thirsty mouths.

If sweet is the flow of my speech, this belongs to the Truth,
but if it is insipid, feeble and weak, this is from the earth into which
the source crossed over.

- 16 I confess, my Lord, a mouth that became a merchant and upon
Your table

cast down the silver that acquired the symbols of the olive tree and
the types of oil.

Who has seen the branches of the olive tree that gave symbols
instead of fruits?

A type germinated instead of leaves. Who again has seen
oil that became a simile of the sea and the symbols in it a simile of
fish,

and the tongue that sings, a banquet to hungry ears!

5

The second hymn on oil or ointment stresses the use of oil as a fuel for lamps and thence the role of Christ the Light of the world. The first strophe clearly enunciates this notion: "Without light all would be devoid of usefulness, and without the Anointed everything would be lacking fulfillment" (str. 1.7–10). The prophets are lamps, but Christ is the sun and the apostles His rays (str. 2). The menorah with the Tabernacle represents the lights of the cosmos—the sun, moon and planets; yet all point mysteriously to Christ the Light (str. 3). Just as the oil of a lamp floats on water, Christ walked on water and enabled Simon to do so as well (str. 4). Since the lamp makes even the hours of day and night, it represents God's justice (str. 7). As the light consumes darkness, so the Messiah consumes death; the lost are found by the lamplight and by the Messiah (str. 8). John the Baptist, the virgins who await the bridegroom in the New Testament parable, and the prophet Hezekiah all provide meditations on Christ the Light (str. 9, 10, 12).

The final few strophes depart from the theme of light to develop a few other uses of oil of symbolic import: oil as soothing food—hence like the Eucharist (str. 11); oil as protection against rust—symbolic of Christ's sharpening of the mind (str. 13); for consoling the barren and for women in childbirth (str. 14); and for the persecuted (str. 15). The last two are fortified with scriptural examples. In the final strophe he elaborates with reference to the oil of the olive the broader notion of the symbols of God in the creation and in scripture.

5

The same melody

- 1 Again, oil fixes for us a lamp, a luminary in the height,
and the glory of the Anointed, the true Light, shone forth from
Golgotha.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

By the luminary all is arranged, and by the Anointed all is explained.

Without light all would be devoid of usefulness,
and without the Anointed everything would be lacking fulfillment.
The light is sufficient for visible things and the Anointed for all hidden things.

Refrain: Glory to the Anointed Who came, and the symbols ran to His fulfillment.

2 By the Anointed again and by His power, lamps resist in the darkness,
and by the Holy Spirit the prophets were strong within the People.
Oil strengthens lamps to struggle with darkness
until the sun comes with its breath and dispels it.
The Spirit sustained the prophets so that falsehood was mitigated⁶⁴
by truth
before the Sun Who pursues error by the twelve rays that He extends.

3 Again, oil served as a beam in the temporal Tabernacle
since in a seven-branched candlestick its flow served seven flames
in a symbol of our Lord from Whom seven lights of seven spirits
shone.⁶⁵
The seven-[branched] candlestick brought forth the light of its seven
brightnesses⁶⁶
by which the temporal Tabernacle enlightens. Mary brought forth
the Luminary
of the seven holy brightnesses that illuminate for us all creation.⁶⁷

4 Just like the Anointed, oil is empowered to run upon the waves.⁶⁸
It also gave power to the flame to walk on water.
As his Lord gave Simon [power] to walk on the waves.

64. The *ettafal*, otherwise unattested, is used here, as Beck has noted.

65. Rev. 3.1, 4.5, 5.6. As Beck notes, Justin Martyr interprets the sevenfold spirit of Isa. 11.2 as descending through seven Jewish "prophets" to Christ; Just. dial. 87. In addition there may be some allusion to Jewish mystical traditions such as the *Sefer Yetzirah*; cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 75–78.

66. The Syriac word also means "manifestation" or "epiphany." In the course of the hymn, Ephrem calls upon each of these nuances.

67. That is, the sun, the moon and the five planets known in antiquity: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Mercury; cf. G.E.R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York, 1970), 82, n. 1.

68. Cf. Matt. 14.22–33.

HYMN 5

Like the Anointed, oil rescues the sinking flame
that flickers in the womb of water like Simon in the sea of water.
By a flame oil enlightens the house; by Simon the Anointed
enlightened the inhabited earth.

- 5 Again, oil labors; even in a lamp it works
to make the tree of light great, to extend its brightness in the
darkness.

Since the eye in [darkness] hungers for light, after the sun [sets],
then there is the lamp;
it consoles the pupils deprived of luminousness.

...

- 6 Therefore the lamp is like an ombudsman⁶⁹ of the eye cheated by
the dark.

In the nights of November,⁷⁰ when the dark overreaches the light,
so that diligence does not suffice for work since the day is short,
the lamp claims for [diligence] the hours that the dark overreached
so that [diligence] may work in the long night until the short day
rises.

Truth judged the overreaching: what the dark overreached, the light
claimed.

- 7 Who has seen the diligence that became like a balance
to weigh night and daytime and make them ascend in the same
proportion.

For the short day grieved⁷¹ the diligent who did not complete the
course,

and the long night extended the joy of the cowardly.

But the lamp and diligence balanced the night and daytime,
so that idleness would not distress the best, nor would the cowardly
rejoice in loss.

- 8 Darkness is the food of light,⁷² since where it finds [darkness], [light]
swallows it.

69. Throughout the stanza, Ephrem contrasts *tb'*, "to claim, vindicate, avenge," with *'lb*, "to oppress, defraud, surpass, take advantage." It is difficult to find an English word for each of these that has all the nuances contained in the Syriac words.

70. Tishri (two months, October and November).

71. A pun on the two meanings of *kr'*, "to be short" and "to be sad, grieved."

72. The words used here for darkness and light are not the same as those used earlier in this hymn.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

[This is] a revealed symbol of the Anointed Who by His life
consumes death.

By the lamp, again, are found the things lost in the dark,
and by the Anointed, too, is found the soul that was lost.

The lamp returned our lost things, and the Anointed also [returned]
our treasures.

The lamp found the coin, and the Anointed [found] the image of
Adam.⁷³

- 9 A weak lamp is the symbol of John since they both have a short
time.

The lamp is not bridegroom of the eye, nor is John bridegroom of
the church.⁷⁴

They are friends of the two bridegrooms and beloved of the two
brides.

They were not bridegrooms; they were icons of the Only-begotten
Bridegroom.

The eye sees in the lamp the likeness of the sun, her rightful
bridegroom.

The church saw in John the likeness of her true Partner.⁷⁵

- 10 Oil enriches the light of the lamps symbolically.

The Anointed enriches the lamps of the virgins espoused to Him.

The lamps take types from the visible lamps.

For small is the light of a lamp whose [supply of] oil is small.

Since the time of the Bridegroom is not revealed to us, you virgins
have become our Watchers⁷⁶

so that your lamps might gladden, and your hosannas might glorify.

- 11 Oil with meals soothes its eaters like its Lord,

Who also soothes His eaters with the tastes of all helps.

The Anointed captures for the sick restoration from the house of the
dead.

For a lamp that has sputtered and gone out returns by oil,

73. The Syriac word translated here as "image," *šlm'*, is used to refer to the image on coins, so here Ephrem alludes not only to Luke 15.8-10, but also to the theological idea of the restoration of the *imago dei* by Christ.

74. Cf. John 3.27-30.

75. The reference seems to be to the vision of the church in the Book of Revelation. Possibly the argument against overestimation of John the Baptist is an anti-Mandaean polemic.

76. Ephrem refers both to the angels called Watchers and to the gospel parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Matt. 25.1-13.

HYMN 5

and lamps that had been stifled, by oil returned from death,
for He was God Whose helps are much swifter than His lightning
bolts.

- 12 Our body resembles a lamp, since it flourishes and sputters.
Our oil resembles our Anointed since it shows the symbols of our
God.

Our world resembles our lamp, and they both resemble Hezekiah.
Hear, my brothers, [these] three symbols how they are portrayed:
A lamp awakes by oil; by means of the sun Hezekiah awoke.
But the world awoke and shone by means of the Anointed, the
Flood of mercy.

- 13 Oil smears the edge of a sword; the Anointed polishes the mind.
The sword makes the killer tremble, and the tongue of truth [makes]
doubters [tremble].

Oil preserves the sword from rust that is brought forth on it
since contact with the earth harms it—a hateful symbol.
The Anointed dwells in the mind and restrains from it harms
that are brought forth by laxity like a maggot [brought forth] by
negligence.

- 14 Therefore, [oil is] like God, Who loves virginity:
the daughter of the symbol of the house of Michael and kinswoman
of the house of Gabriel.⁷⁷

[Oil] consoles the barren women like Sarah and Rebekah and
Rachel.

It also strengthens those who bring forth [children]
like Leah, Zilpah and Bilhah, since to [oil] marriage is pure,
since [marriage] is a vine planted on earth, and like fruits the babes
hang on it.

- 15 Again, oil became an image for the persecuted, envied Jacob.⁷⁸

...

The sceptre . . . openly, oil and his symbol secretly.
Oil ran like an envoy and etched and made
parables whose explanations became easy because of our Lord:

77. Virginity is the angelic state. Cf. Virg. 1.8.

78. Cf. Gen. 27.41–45.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

He espoused the soul to God instead of the stone that Jacob signed.⁷⁹

- 16 For oil became the key of the hidden treasure-house of symbols.
It propounds for us the similes⁸⁰ of God Who became human.⁸¹
The whole creation gave Him all the symbols hidden in it.
The scriptures also gave their parables,⁸² and they were explained in Him.

And the writings [gave] all their types and the Law also its shadows.⁸³

The olive tree stripped off and gave to the Anointed the comeliness of the symbols upon it.

79. When Jacob poured oil on the rock, Gen. 28.18, he "signed" it with the symbol of Christ, the Anointed One. Since Jacob designated the rock as the House of God, it represents for Ephrem the type of the church, which is the bride of Christ (cf. Eph. 5.21-33, and CH 17.5). Here, though, it is the bride of the Father, an unusual usage.

80. Syriac *dmwt'*, here in the plural, is most often translated "likeness," as in Gen. 1.26, cited by Ephrem in HdF 6.7. It may also mean a picture either in the sense of a likeness either exact or merely similar; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 261-63. The best analogy to this passage is Virg. 28.2, where Christ adds the pigments to the symbols presented by the Jewish scripture to create his own likeness; *ibid.*

81. Literally, son of man, *br 'dm*.

82. Syriac *mtl'* essentially has the meaning of parable, proverb or simile, and Ephrem uses it as the equivalent of *r'z'*, *twps'*, *tlp'*, or *dmwt'*, as much as for *pl't'* cf. Virg 8.1-8 and *ibid.* 261-68.

83. Although his use of *spr'*, *ktb'* and *nmws'* is tantalizingly reminiscent of the rabbis' threefold division of scripture into Law, Prophets and Writings (Torah, Neviim and Ketubim), Ephrem is using them synonymously rather than to indicate discrete portions of scripture; cf. *ibid.* 263f.

6

In this hymn Ephrem argues that the priesthood and the kingship of the Chosen People have passed through Christ to include the Gentiles along with the Jews. Through Moses and Solomon these offices were bestowed on the Jewish people (str. 1). Zechariah's prophetic vision of two olive trees shows the continuation of these two lines in two covenants, one for Jews, the other for Gentiles (str. 2), but it also presents the typological key for understanding that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed One. The olive branch brought back by the dove after the Flood symbolizes not only peace but also Jesus, the Anointed, the First-born of the dead (str. 3–4). The entry into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, the anointing of Christ by the sinful woman, the preparation of the way of Christ by John the Baptist all are interwoven with the oil of the olive tree, thus implying that Jesus is heir to the priesthood and kingship (str. 5–9). The properties and uses of olive oil itself also point to Christ and his followers: steadfastness (str. 10), the anointing of athletes (str. 11–13), oil as a means of easing conflicting forces (str. 14).

6

The same melody

- 1 Oil in the likeness of the Heavenly One became the giver of kingship.

From the horn [of oil] a pure cloud descended upon the head of a body,⁸⁴

as God descended upon the top of the mountain⁸⁵ and gave brightness to Moses,

and Solomon received brightness symbolically

84. The "body" is the People of Israel.

85. Literally, the "head" of the mountain; cf. Exod. 24.15–18, 34.29–35.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

from the horn of messiahship.⁸⁶ From the People to the peoples it
went out.

Instead of the few, many will be anointed and cleansed.

*Refrain: Blessed is He Who gave eyes to the peoples to see the symbols of the Son, the
Anointed.*⁸⁷

- 2 Again, Zechariah saw two olive branches as sources;
[from] the one would flow priesthood, and [from] the other its
companion, kingship.⁸⁸
In the Captivity the treasure of the two poured forth [and] gave two
branches:
atonement and redemption after the Captivity
to the polluted and constrained People. He gave, again, two
covenants:
purification and redemption to the polluted and oppressed peoples.
- 3 The olive tree, again, became the first-born of the trees that were
buried
in the Flood, in the likeness of its Lord Who became the First-born
from the house of the dead.
Therefore the olive tree passed through the Deluge, and before all
[else] it was revived.⁸⁹
It rose up [and] gave its leaf as a pledge for the revival of all.
The dove found and eagerly desired it—the bird that seeks our
inhabited land.
[The dove] announced that there was a survivor, and [the olive tree]
sent a greeting in her mouth.
- 4 [The olive tree] passed through the waves [and] rose up as king and
sent its envoy of peace,
and it gave good tidings to the confined and brought forth praise in
the mouth of the silent.
Plucked from it was consolation, a leaf that enlightened the eyes of
all.
It announced to Noah that anger was defeated, and mercy was
victorious.

86. Cf. 1 Kgs. 1.39.

87. The Syriac permits but does not demand the causal connection here.

88. Cf. Zech. 4.11–14.

89. Gen. 8.10–11.

HYMN 6

- The sight of the leaf, although mute, sowed exultation with the
sorrowful.
- For them it became a mirror of peace in which they saw the peace
of the earth.
- 5 In the descent of the Mount of Olives palm trees and olive trees
partook:
two whose leaves were not worthy for our Lord . . . who shed His
garments.
. . . a sweet voice . . .
- That a sweet voice . . . was . . . for the Lord . . .
- And the olive tree that . . . openings of lamps with its flash of light.
With its branches [the palm tree] enriches the babes praising with
their hosannas.⁹⁰
- 6 For the olive tree is like John.⁹¹ He foretold a symbol of his Lord.
The king, the Anointed, shone forth and came; the olive tree went
out to meet its Lord;
with children who bore his tree branches, he was stripped [and]
divided his branches.
It was prophesied that his Lord would shed [and] divide his
garments.⁹²
- The olive tree that bore symbols witnessed to the One Who came to
complete his symbols.
He sent a crown from his branches to the Slain One Who would
conquer death.
- 7 The dove gave rest to Noah⁹³ in the Flood, and the dove's
kinswoman, Mary,⁹⁴
with good oil instead of a leaf portrayed the symbol of the Son's
death.
The oil jar she poured on Him emptied out a treasure of types on
Him.⁹⁵
- In that moment the symbols of oil took shelter⁹⁶ in the Anointed,

90. Cf. Mark 11.1–11 et par.

91. The Baptist.

92. Cf. Mark 15.20, 24 et par.

93. A pun on the two vocalizations of the root *nwh* meaning "Noah" and "to rest."

94. Mary Magdalen, identified with the sinful woman of Luke 7.37–50.

95. A pun on *šp'*, "to pour," and *špq*, "to empty, pour out."

96. A pun on two meanings of the verb *tšp*, "to take refuge" and "to symbolize." The use of the preposition "b" indicates that the former meaning is the literal sense here.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

and the treasurer of the symbols of oil completed the symbols for
the Lord of symbols:

the creation conceived His symbols; Mary⁹⁷ conceived His limbs.

8 Therefore many wombs brought forth the Only-begotten.

The belly brought Him forth by travail, and the creation also
brought Him forth by symbols.

He put on one body of limbs and another of glories.

Eternal power does not become weary; He worked but gave us rest
since it wearied the creatures to bear the symbols of His
majesty.

They were weighed down by His symbols like the belly that carried
Him.

9 Oil is next of kin of priesthood like John, a son of priesthood.

He opened out a path in the hearing where formerly the voice had
been stopped up,

and the word flows into the ear so that it portrays the will of the
speaker in it.

But in this path opened out by John

the Word of the hidden Father flowed. Since the image of Him Who
sent Him is portrayed by Him,

by Him is beautified the ugliness of the peoples, who acquired His
comeliness.

10 The confident olive tree does not fear the lion that frightens all.

In the pains of cold winter its leaves resist as the steadfast [do].

They are a type of the steadfast who held fast to the Anointed, the
Olive Tree.

In persecution the doubters fell like leaves

that do not stay on their trees, but the anointed ones depend on⁹⁸
the Anointed

like the leaves of the olive tree in winter, entirely rooted in it.

11 Again, a symbol of God is the olive that is upright and good in the
contest,

for it grasps the beginning [and] also girds the ends.

...

97. Here Ephrem shifts from Mary Magdalen to Mary, the Mother of Jesus. This is not unusual for him, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 146-48.

98. or "hang from."

HYMN 6

- 12 . . .
For the oil in a contest gives the crown to the victor.
The Anointed, Who is Truth, gives us true freedom, my brothers.
Athletes with a temporal crown acquire time;
from the burden . . . the Anointed sets free with a crown of praise.
From the slavery of sin He freed His church by His victory.
- 13 With oil athletes smear . . .
. . . disciple . . . learns.
He, if he fails, feels ashamed . . .
The athlete . . . his companion is praised,
The disciple who neglects to take from his companion learns.
If . . . is worshipped; if . . . is glorified.
- 14 Oil teaches acceptableness to disobedient harshness,
that it might appear to comply sweetly with harsh force that grasps
it.
But the Anointed made us oppressed so that instead of one blow we
might be struck two,
that we might mix double harshness with sweetness,
and instead of a mile we might go two, . . . ⁹⁹

99. Matt. 5.39–41 et par. Strophe 15 is illegible.

Although the relationship among the motifs is sometimes elusive, this fourth and final hymn on oil and the olive focuses primarily on baptismal themes, especially on the concept of baptism as rebirth.¹⁰⁰ Repentance and diligence are both necessary, the former for success in the world of the spirit, the latter for success in this world (str. 1). Both fall and spring represent fresh beginnings (str. 2). Whereas Jezebel's evildoing stultified these natural processes, Elijah as agent of the Lord restored them, bringing rain as well as immediate food for the hungry (str. 3–4). Since oil is used for painting, the oil of baptism symbolizes the restoration of the image of God in the baptized (str. 5–6). Oil is not only appropriate to priesthood but also for those about to die, hence its use in baptism symbolizes death and rebirth as well as forgiveness (str. 6–8).

The use of oil to blot out debts on a written document further enhances the symbolic action of the baptismal anointing (str. 9). Oil's characteristic of floating on water brings to mind the immortal divine nature of Christ, whose voluntary death is like the rescue of a drowned man, Adam (str. 10). Elisha's payment of a debt with oil to save the widow's children from enslavement provides a scriptural type for salvation through Christ (str. 11–12). By its oil, its branches and its leaves, the olive represents the mortality, the victory and the resurrection of Jesus (str. 13). As a vessel of oil acts as a mirror, so also Christ has many faces, each appropriate to the beholder (str. 14). Finally, with a touch of humor, Ephrem portrays himself sinking in waves of oil, the plethora of his symbolic interpretations, crying out like Peter for help (str. 15).

100. A translation of this hymn appears in Brock, *Harp*, 59–61.

HYMN 7

7

The same melody

- 1 Repentance and diligence: for both worlds they are required.
For the work of the earth, diligent [people]; for the work of the
spirit, penitents.

Although he may not become rich, a diligent man's prosperity
stands on its own,
and though he may utterly fail, the penitent is one of the victorious.
Miserable people and sinners put on the entire evil name,
for the idle have shame, and sinners have reproach.

*Refrain: How much can we marvel at You, our Savior? Your glory is greater than
our tongue.*

- 2 October¹⁰¹ revives the weary from the dust and dirt of summer;
its rain bathes and its dew anoints¹⁰² even the trees and their fruits.
April¹⁰³ revives fasters, anoints, dips and whitens;
it scours the dirt of sin from our souls.
October tramples the oil for us; April increases mercy for us.
In October fruits are harvested; in April debts are forgiven.
- 3 Since Jezebel refused the truth, the earth refused her ingathering.
A reproach bereaved the womb of the seed that the farmers lent her.
It choked seeds inside it since her dwellers bereaved truth,
and the bearer became barren, which was not in her custom,
and the pitcher and horn,¹⁰⁴ barren, brought forth and were
fruitful—which is not in their nature,
since the voice that bereaved the earth made barren wombs fruitful.
- 4 But hunger overran the earth, and the reserves [of food] fell short,
so that full storehouses were emptied, and cellars, too, were left
bare.
Elijah joined together flour and oil as a yoke,¹⁰⁵
and he who was taken up in a chariot and conquered death,¹⁰⁶

101. Tishri (two months, October and November).

102. A pun on *ms̄h*, "to bathe" and *mš̄h*, "to anoint."

103. Nisan (April, or often simply the season of spring).

104. ■ vessel for oil.

105. Cf. 1 Kgs. 17.8–16.

106. Cf. 2 Kgs. 2.1–12.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

conquered hunger in two symbols. Rain was the end of his course
since the Lord of the clouds extended to him a crown of plenty from
His floods.¹⁰⁷

- 5 With visible pigments the image of kingship is portrayed,
and with visible oil is portrayed the hidden image of our hidden
King.

With the drawings¹⁰⁸ that baptism labors to bring forth in her
womb,
from the portrayal of the primal man who was corrupted
she portrays a new image, and she gives birth to them with three
labor pangs
that [are] the three glorious names of Father and Son and Holy
Spirit.

- 6 Oil is, therefore, the friend of the Holy Spirit and Her minister.
As a disciple it accompanies Her, since by it She seals priests and
anointed ones,
for the Holy Spirit by the Anointed brands Her sheep.
In the symbol of the signet ring that in sealing wax marks its
imprint,
also the hidden mark of the Spirit is imprinted by the oil on bodies
anointed in baptism and sealed in the dipping.

- 7 For by the oil of departure are anointed for absolution
bodies full of stains, and they are whitened, without being beaten.¹⁰⁹
They descended in debts as filthy ones and ascended pure as babes
since they have baptism, another womb.
[Baptism's] giving birth rejuvenates the old just as the river
rejuvenated Na'man.¹¹⁰

O to the womb that gives birth to royal sons every day without
birthpangs!

- 8 Priesthood is a servant to this womb in her giving birth.
Anointing rushes before her; the Holy Spirit hastens upon her
floods;

107. Cf. 1 Kgs. 18.45-46.

108. Here and in the following strophe the Syriac *ṣm* and its derivatives have been translated variously to suit the context; the nuances range from drawing to sealing, imprinting and stamping, to engraving, etching and branding.

109. The image is of laundry washed in a river.

110. Cf. 2 Kgs. 5.1-14.

HYMN 7

the crown of Levites surrounds her; the High Priest was made her servant.

The Watchers rejoice in the lost that were found by her.

O to the womb that, having given birth, is nourished and educated by the altar!¹¹¹

O to the babes who immediately eat perfect bread instead of milk!

- 9 The Anointed, source of all helps, accompanied the body, source of pains.

For oil blots out debts as the Flood blotted out the unclean.

For the Deluge, like the Just One, justly blots out evil people.

Since they did not conquer their lust, those who deluged [the earth] with it, floated.

But oil in the likeness of the Gracious One blots out our debts in baptism.

Since sin is drowned in the water, let it not be revived by desires.

- 10 Oil by its love became companion to the diver who in his need hates his life and descends and in water buries himself.

Oil, a nature that does not sink, becomes a partaker with the body that sinks,

and it dove down to bring up from the deep a treasure of wealth.

The Anointed, a nature that does not die, put on a mortal body;

He dove down and brought up from the water the living treasure of the house of Adam.

- 11 Oil gave itself for purchase instead of orphans that they not be sold.¹¹²

For the orphans it was like a guardian that restrained force that entered to tear away

from the root of freedom two brothers like shoots¹¹³ and onto the root of slavery to graft them.

The payment of oil silenced the promissory notes crying out against the debtors.

It cut off those coming to cut off a mother from her children.

- 12 Oil by its love in a symbol of the Anointed repaid the debts that were not its own.

111. The Syriac is active.

112. Cf. 2 Kgs. 4.1–7.

113. The translation here is based on the text emended as per Beck's suggestion.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

A free treasure was found in an earthen vessel for debtors¹¹⁴
like the Treasure found for the peoples in an earthly body.
Oil became a slave for purchase for the the freeing of the noble.
The Anointed became a slave for purchase for the freeing of the
slaves of sin.

Both in name and in deed oil portrayed the Anointed.

13 Oil acknowledges You entirely, for oil revives all.

It serves as the Anointed, Reviver of all; in streams, branches and
leaves it portrays Him.

With its branches it praised Him through children; with its streams
it anointed Him through Mary;

with its leaf, too, through the dove it serves as His type.

With its branches it portrays the symbol of His victory; with its
streams it portrays the symbol of His mortality;

with its leaf it portrays the symbol of resurrection, and like death
the Flood vomited it up.

14 That face that looks at the vessel that oil fills

sees an image of itself there, and one who looks at it secretly
by its symbols sees the Anointed and His many beauties.

The olive, too, has many symbols . . .

The Anointed is all faces and the oil is just like a mirror;¹¹⁵
from wherever I look at the oil the Anointed looks out at me from
within.

15 Who, indeed, buried me, a weakling, among the pounding waves?

It is as if the waves of oil took me [and] gave me to the concerns of
the Anointed.

The waves of the Anointed struck me and gave me to the symbols
of oil.

The waves appease the waves, but I am in the middle.

I, too, am grieved, like Simon; draw me out, my Lord, as You did
Simon!¹¹⁶

Myriads of waves have sunk me! Merciful One, draw me out, a
weakling!

114. Cf. 2 Kgs. 4.1–7.

115. Cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 270f.

116. Cf. Matt. 14.28–33.

8

This is the first of three hymns that share not only the same melody and the alphabetical acrostic form but also the theme of the fulfillment and consequent obsolescence of Jewish scripture and customs through Christ. This first hymn has only the first seven letters of the alphabet—aleph through teth—and it often intersperses strophes that do not fit the acrostic.¹¹⁷ Although the third strophe enunciates the characteristic theme of the entire collection of hymns, the symbolic presence of Christ in scripture and in nature, it also indicates the focus of his hymn on Christ as the fulfillment of Jewish scripture: He is king, prophet and priest.

Paradox, often a favored tool of Ephrem, plays an important role here as he wields the double-edged sword of typological exegesis: Christ both fulfills and abolishes the Jewish religion. He not only completes and explains all of Jewish scripture (str. 1–8), but he also puts to an end all Jewish customs (str. 9–11). He completes the truth and beauty of Judaism (str. 12), and John the Baptist, last of the prophets, is succeeded by the apostles (str. 13). The Patriarchs and Jewish religious and political leaders symbolize Christ, his apostles and his Church (str. 14–17). The Levitical priesthood has been replaced by the Christian apostolic priesthood (str. 18–21). Despite the envy of the Jewish people, here clearly held responsible for the death of Jesus, the cross of Christ is the proper interpreter of the Torah (str. 22–23).

8

To the melody, "Rich by His symbol"

' 1 He came to us in His love, the blessed Tree.

Wood dissolved wood. Fruit was annihilated by fruit,
the murderer [annihilated] by the Living One.

117. On the content of the additional strophes, cf. note on str. 9, below.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Refrain: Blessed is the One Whom the prophets portrayed.

- B 2 In Eden and in the inhabited earth are parables of our Lord.¹¹⁸
Who is able to gather the likenesses of the symbols of Him,
all of Whom is portrayed in all?
- B 3 In scripture He is written; in nature He is engraved.
His diadem is portrayed by kings, and by prophets His truth,
His atonement by priests.
- 4 He is in the rod of Moses and in the hyssop of Aaron
and in the diadem of David. The prophets have His likeness,
but the apostles have His gospel.
- 5 In the beginning¹¹⁹ again upon the wood alighted the weary dove.
On You, the Tree of Life, came, took refuge,¹²⁰ and alighted
the weary Testament.¹²¹
- G 6 Revelations gazed at You; similes awaited You;
symbols expected You; likenesses longed for You;
parables took refuge in you.
- G 7 [God] revealed Your symbol in the rod that [both] rescued and
drowned.¹²²
Its interpretation is in Your cross.¹²³ oppressors drowned by it,
but the oppressed rose up by it.
- G 8 His power perfected the types, and His truth the symbols,
His interpretation the similies, His explanation the sayings,
and His assurances the difficulties.
- 9 By His sacrifice He abolished sacrifices, and libations by His
incense,
and the [Passover] lambs by His slaughter, the unleavened [bread]
by His bread,
and the bitter [herbs] by His Passion.¹²⁴

118. For *pl't'*, parable, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 264–68.

119. Or “in Genesis.” The allusion is to the dove at the end of the Deluge, Gen. 8.6–12.

120. Or “symbolized, typified.”

121. Christ, Tree of Life, completes and gives meaning to the “Old Testament,” just as the olive tree gave a resting place to the dove sent out by Noah.

122. Cf. Exod. 14.16, 21, 26–27.

123. The same word means wood or tree as well as cross; it is translated variously in this hymn to suit the nuances. Ephrem’s poetry, however, hinges upon the multiple meanings of the single word.

124. Like the Epistle to the Hebrews, Ephrem argues that the death of Christ ended the sacrificial cult of the religion of Israel, but he also argues that it ended the Passover celebration. The latter is an important issue in early Christian polemics against rabbinic Judaism. This

HYMN 8

- 10 By His healthy meal He weaned [and] took away the milk.
By His baptism were¹²⁵ abolished the bathing and sprinkling
that the elders of the [Jewish] People taught.
- 11 By His food refused were¹²⁶ food tithes,
for food is not unclean; thought is defiled,
and envy . . . ¹²⁷
- 12 In the genuineness of His truth and the power of His light
He showed His beauty [to] His own. His adornments came [and]
were beautiful on Him;
His sufferings came [and] were completed in Him.
- 13 In John [the Baptist] He set a limit and restrained the prophets,
and he called and sent apostles. He dismissed and put to rest the
former,
and put to work and wearied the latter.
- 14 On Abel your flock is imprinted;¹²⁸ in Noah is portrayed Your
church.¹²⁹
Your flock¹³⁰ [is portrayed] in Jacob, and in the rod of Moses
is portrayed the rod of Your flock.
- H 15 On the tribes of Jacob Your twelve are¹³¹ imprinted:
on Judah your robe, and on Levi Your censer,
and Your dispensation on Joseph.¹³²
- 16 In Shem your likeness exults,¹³³ in Abraham Your joy.¹³⁴

strophe and several others (viz., 4–5, 9–14, 16–17, 19, 23) do not fit the form of the alphabetical acrostic and contain markedly stronger anti-Judaic or anti-Judaizing polemics. Possibly they were added later by Ephrem or someone else to reinforce the polemic of strophes 20–22, which are formally congruent with the beginning of the hymn.

125. The Syriac is singular.

126. The Syriac is singular.

127. Mark 7.14–23 et par.

128. Cf. Nat. 1.42 and note ad loc.

129. Cf. Nat. 1.22f., 45, 56–58 and notes ad loc.

130. A different word from that used in the first line of this stanza.

131. The Syriac is singular.

132. The first lines allude to the twelve apostles as the fulfillment of the types of the twelve tribes of Israel. The last three lines give the attributes of Judah's kingship and Levi's priesthood to Christ; perhaps the fact that none of the twelve tribes is associated with prophecy explains the choice of Joseph for the third type.

133. As Beck suggests, citing CH 5.11–12, probably this should be Seth. For Seth as the likeness of Adam, cf. Gen. 5.3. Since Christ is the new Adam, Seth is in the likeness of Christ, cf. Tonneau, Gen/Exod 5.1, CSCO 152 (scr. syr. 71), 54; cf. Nat. 1.21 and note ad loc. But on Shem, cf. also Nat. 1.24.

134. Cf. Nat. 1.59.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- Isaac bore Your cross.¹³⁵ The former and the latter
were clothed [in] Your likenesses.
- 17 In the sings and the dew of Gideon Your teaching was portrayed,
for it fell in drops and came down and moistened the dryness of
the peoples.
Their fruits were pleasing to You.
- H 18 By David was written the oath of Your Father
that Your priesthood is true. Brought to an end are the temporal
priests;
"You shall be a priest forever."¹³⁶
- 19 This oath . . .
. . . from Your flock went out
blessings for the universe.
- Z 20 More noble is Melchizedek¹³⁷ than the priests of the People.
Among the peoples he is a priest and teaches that the Priest Who is
coming to the peoples
will be slain by the People.
- H 21 Envious of You is the tribe of Levi for they are aware of Your
hyssop
that whitens the peoples. By You the apostles became priests
so that the Levites were brought to an end by You.
- T 22 Jealous of You is the People that is aware that You will teach the
peoples.
By means of death they silenced You. Your death itself became
endowed with speech;
it instructs and teaches the universe.
- 23 The scribes knew that by You the writings of Moses
would be dispersed in the inhabited earth. Although they fastened
You on a cross,
Your cross explained the scripture.

135. Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice, a popular type of Christ among early Christian writers; cf. Nat. 8.13.

136. Ps. 110.4.

137. Cf. Nat. 1.24 and note ad loc.

9

This second anti-Jewish polemic hymn in acrostic form begins with the second letter of the alphabet—beth—and continues to the middle—mim—with a few letters missing or out of order. The following hymn begins with the next letter—nun—and completes the alphabet; no doubt they constitute two halves of a single hymn. This hymn focuses on the conflicting messianic views of Jews and Christians and argues strongly that the Messiah has come; he is not still to come. The primary metaphor here is a flowing of the “types and symbols of scripture” like streams into the sea, which is Christ.

9

The same melody.

- B 1* With the advent of our Sun lamps served¹³⁸ and passed away,
and types and symbols ceased. With hidden circumcision
visible circumcision was abolished.

Refrain: Glory to the First-born, the Anointed One!

- D 2* The Testament¹³⁹ of Moses awaited His gospel.
All the old things took flight and came to perch
on His New Testament.
- D 3* For his Law is weak; it is unable to enclose
the great flow of His symbols in the small bosom¹⁴⁰
of its kings and priests.

138. Ephrem puns on *šmš*, “sun,” and *šmš*, “to serve.” The “lamps” are the Old Testament types of Christ; their truth is overshadowed by the fullness of his truth.

139. A misprint [?] in Beck’s text makes this plural, although the verb is singular.

140. The Syriac *ʿwb* may designate any kind of hollow or recess. It occurs throughout this hymn in diverse senses, rendered variously as “bosom,” “womb” or “gulf” depending on the immediate context.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- W 4 If the blind say that the types and symbols of scripture
are kept for the one to come, their disgrace is manifest
for the Messiah has come.
- W 5 The blind err, for this flow of symbols
pours from the former ones to Him, [but] it cuts off the one to
come
for the Messiah has received it.
- W 6 Since the bosoms of the just were too small, He poured out [the
flow of symbols],
and since the [messiah] to come is false,¹⁴¹ [the flow] cuts off before
him
since it met Him in the sea.
- W 7 This stream of symbols was unable to cleave
the sea into which it fell and to flow toward another
since the Sea of truth received it.
- W 8 Since it is a wondrous gulf,¹⁴² all creatures
cannot fill it. It confines all of them
but is not confined by them.
- H 9 The prophets poured into it their glorious symbols.
Priests and kings poured into it their wondrous types.
All of them poured into all of it.¹⁴³
- Z 10 Christ¹⁴⁴ was victorious and rose up. By His explanations for
symbols,
by His interpretations for similes, He, like the sea, will receive
into Himself all the streams.
- H 11 Consider that if all the kings willed to turn aside
all the rivers so that they would not come to the sea,
[the rivers] would [still] come to it by force.
- Y 12 Therefore, the sea is Christ Who is able to receive

141. In this and the following verses Ephrem argues against the Jewish argument that the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, has not yet come.

142. The gulf is the sea, which is Christ; cf. str. 12, below. Greek Christian writers often use the philosophical formulae, "enclosing" and "not enclosed" to describe God; cf. W. R. Schoedel, "Enclosing, Not Enclosed: The Early Christian Doctrine of God," *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition*, ed. W. R. Schoedel and R. Wilken, Festschrift for Robert Grant, *Théologie Historique* 53, 75-86. Ephrem's expression here appears to be the equivalent of these formulae.

143. This strophe is out of order in the alphabetical arrangement and perhaps belongs before strophe 4.

144. Or "the Messiah," "the Anointed One."

HYMN 9

the sources and springs and rivers and streams
that flow forth¹⁴⁵ from within scripture.

K 13 The gulf of every depth into which rivers incline
will be chagrined by [the sea], since it cannot receive
their streams into itself.

L 14 Again, toward whomever you wish to incline scripture,
he, too, will be proved unable to fulfill
its histories in himself.

M 15 For it is Christ who perfects its symbols by His cross,
its types by His body, its adornments by His beauty,
and all of it by all of Him!

145. The Syriac is more graphic, "belch forth."

10

This hymn is the completion of the acrostic begun in the ninth hymn. Here Ephrem argues that the principal symbol of the Jewish scripture, the Passover, must refer to something beyond itself, namely to Christ. The salvation of the Passover does not refer to Moses (str. 2), nor is it self-sufficient, referring to nothing beyond the historical events themselves (str. 5). Its true meaning is that Christ has saved all people from Satan and from sin (str. 3–4). The truth of this view has been confirmed by the destruction of Jerusalem (str. 6–7). Further, the words of David in Psalm 110 predict Christ (str. 8–12). He closes with the metaphor of Christ the sea (str. 13–17), thematically linking this hymn with the previous one.

10

The same melody

- N 1 Experiment, my son, by applying some of the histories of the First-born
to the glorious Moses, and see that he, being conquered,
is unequal to their power.

Refrain: Blessed is He Whom the prophets portrayed.

- S 2 This [miracle] of Egypt greatly hinders Moses
who saved the people by blood since it was not a symbol of himself
he portrayed by the sprinkled blood.
- ‘ 3 For with [his] generation Moses died in the wilderness,
but the custom of the symbol was living and came
up to binding with the true Lamb.
- P 4 By His blood He saved the peoples as the lamb [saved] the People.
The evil one was conquered by Him instead of Pharaoh, the
tyrant;
and instead of Egypt [they are delivered from] sin.

HYMN 10

- P 5* It would be easy, therefore, to hold that it merely came to be,
this symbol in Egypt. But the truth would not go away
from which the symbol flowed.
- P 6* Parables cry out that by a limit they are restrained.
Behold the revealed sign that with the beginning of the peoples
the end of the People came into being.
- P 7* The priesthood passed away since there is no sacrifice or altar.
Kingship has ceased; there is no throne or diadem.
The People sits in a stupor.
- § 8* Seek and be fulfilled in David and what he sang:
"Sit at my right hand,"¹⁴⁶ and see that [even] in his majesty
he is small in its presence.
- Q 9* Read what he wrote, "The Lord said."
Son of Jesse, reveal to us to whom did the Lord speak,
to your son or to your Lord?¹⁴⁷
- Q 10* David cried out in the spirit, "The Lord said to my lord."
The king of the People is the servant of our King;
Lord and son He was to him.
- R 11* Therefore, high is His nature, and inclined is His compassion.
Lord and son He was to him: Lord because of His nature,
and son because of His compassion.
- R 12* Shepherds and kings arose in the People.
They came to an end, but the symbols did not pass away with
them
until they reached our King.
- § 13* I have omitted the histories of all the prophets
to retrain my mind, for it is a small gulf
insufficient for [all these] droplets.
- § 14* Allow, my tongue, the histories of all scripture
and of all natures to come to the Sea
that is the limit of all of them.
- T 15* Neither the abyss nor the sea is in need of the weak streams.
Those come into it that have been wearied everywhere.
In its gulf they rest.
- T 16* Come to the prophets and see how they need

146. Ps. 110.1.

147. Ibid.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

to come to Christ, Who was wearied by the People.
Among the peoples [the prophets] are at rest.

- T 17* Give me by grace, O blessed Sea,
one droplet of compassion that I may invest it and come
by means of Your flow to You.
- 18* The symbols were silent in love for they saw that Truth was
coming.

Blessed is He Whose parables have fulfilled all scripture
that had drawn His pictures.¹⁴⁸

148. This verse does not fit into the alphabetic acrostic. It begins with shin.

11

This hymn presents with stunning clarity Ephrem's understanding of the symbolic presence of Christ in the natural world. The theme is that, like Christ, Who suffered willingly for the benefit of those who tormented him, many things in the natural world suffer for the benefit of those who exploit them (str. 20). The images are drawn mainly from the world of the builder, the craftsman and the farmer. They include three of the four elements: the sea, air and the earth, exploited by divers, birds and farmers, respectively (str. 4, 15, 16). Raw materials worked by craftsmen are cut stone, wood, iron, gold and pearls (str. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9). Agricultural products suffering for human benefit include wheat, grapes, fruits and honey as well as sheep (str. 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18). Finally, incense thrown on the fire is like Christ and the martyrs (str. 14). In addition to the general theme of philanthropic suffering, several specific allusions to the gospels and sacraments are made: The pearl is like the One Who was pierced; the body of the fruit is eaten for our benefit; the sheared lamb is like "the Lamb who divided his garments for his crucifiers" (str. 9, 12, 17, and cf. 10).

11

To the melody, "Your flock dolefully"

- 1 It is very difficult for the evil one to gaze at his ugliness.
Goodness, like a mirror,¹⁴⁹ comes toward him
to refute by his ugliness one who thinks he is beautiful.

Refrain: Glories to Your grace!

- 2 Grace befalls even the oppressor
that by one thing he might learn two: he is aware and understands
that he himself is bitter, [but] his Lord is sweet.

¹⁴⁹ This image is developed at greater length in Virg. 31.12 and especially in CH 32; cf. Beck, Spiegel.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 3 Because of this He did not come in the generation of the just.
It is not that they would not be worthy but so that His sweetness
might rebuke the bitter who have held back His coming.
- 4 The sea belongs to the diver¹⁵⁰ who bursts in and descends in it.
Its gulf gives space to him; it shows him its treasure;
it gives and enriches him; it carries [him] and brings him up.
- 5 Cut stone becomes by its suffering
a bulwark for the human being.¹⁵¹ In calamity and in battle
it stands before him and preserves his treasures.
- 6 Wood by means of its harsh treatment resembles the cross:
It carries in the sea; it bears on dry land;
it increases by its uses; and enriches by its helps.
- 7 Even strong iron is weak in the fire.
It is malleable and yields to human strength,
and when it has been well-beaten, it repays the one who struck it.
- 8 Noble gold is beaten without offense.
To all those who beat it, it gives its sides as a symbol of our Lord.
Its insult is for honor; its suffering is for glory.
- 9 Iron and a sharp stake, indeed, pierce the pearl
like that One Who was pierced by nails and on the cross.
It becomes by its suffering an adornment for humankind.¹⁵²
- 10 And who will tell the suffering of the grain of wheat?¹⁵³
Indeed, how many scourgings and afflictions it encounters!
By its torments it gives life to its tormentors.
- 11 The foot of its crusher also abuses the cluster of grapes.
By its blood [the foot's] filth is washed away;¹⁵⁴ with its must¹⁵⁵ it
sweetens him;
and if it ages with him, it makes him merry with its wine.
- 12 When a fruit is eaten, by means of its suffering its taste

150. Or the one baptized; it is clear from the previous hymn and from the succeeding strophes of this hymn that Christ is the Sea.

151. Literally, "son of man." On Christ as stone or rock, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 205–12.

152. Ephrem develops this image at length in his hymns on the pearl, HdF 81–85, esp. in 82.12. For French trans., cf. Graffin, *OS* 12 (1967), 129–49; for English, Gwynn, *NPNF* ser. 2, 13, 293–304, which is a reprint of Morris, 84–98; or for HdF 82 only, Brock, *Harp*, 31–33.

153. Cf. John 12.24.

154. Ephrem seems to have in mind the rather unappetizing thought that the dirty feet of the grape treader are washed by the juice of the grape! On the grape cluster as Christological symbol, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 113–30.

155. The juice as it flows from the pressed grapes.

HYMN 11

pours out in the mouth. This is a symbol of that Fruit that brings to life His eaters when His body is eaten.

- 13 When the honey that sweetens all is extracted,
as it is worked, it softens its strength for those who eat it.
It delights health; it nourishes sickness.
- 14 Incenses are, like the victors,¹⁵⁶ cast into the fire.
Their scents rise up like their good Lord
Who by means of His death exhaled the scent of His vitality.
- 15 So also when the bird beats the air
with its wings as with arms, the back [of the air] is subjected to it,
and like a bride it is carried on high by the power [of the air].
- 16 So also the farmer by means of iron
rends and cleaves the earth, but she is not angered by her suffering;
her treasures and her womb she opens by her sufferings.
- 17 The sheep in its shame strips off its garment and cloak
and gives all of it to its shearers,
like the Lamb Who divided His garments for His crucifiers.¹⁵⁷
- 18 Great is the symbol of the lamb who is quiet in his life
and sings in his death. His loins are for festivities
and the strings of his lyre for melodies and songs.
- 19 So old is the teaching that its time is not known.
It dwells in youth although it is scorned along with it.
It becomes small [and] makes it great to honor it very much.
- 20 All these things teach by their symbols:
they open by their sufferings the treasure of their riches,
and the suffering of the Son of the Gracious One is the key of His
treasures.¹⁵⁸

156. That is, the martyrs.

157. Mark 15.24 et par.

158. Despite the postscript reading, "Completed are the four hymns that interpret the mysteries of our Lord," this hymn has no formal or thematic links with the three preceding.

12

The subject of this hymn is the temptation of Christ by Satan as recounted in the gospel of Matthew (Matt. 4.1–11). Each of the thirty strophes begins with the same letter, *ain*, the sixteenth letter of the Syriac alphabet. The hymn has been prefaced to the following large collection (Virg 13–32) apparently because its first two hymns also concern the temptation of Christ.

Throughout the hymn Ephrem shows an interest in the psychology of the tale. Examining the three temptations in turn (str. 1–5; 6–12; 13–16), he probes and then faults the reasoning of Satan. Finally, he imagines Satan's bewilderment in contrasting his relatively easy success in tempting Adam with his utter failure to lure Jesus into sin (str. 17–27, esp. 22–27). The language and imagery of the athletic contest or the debate is used throughout (esp. str. 1–2, 5, 9, 30). There are a few indications of an anti-Arian polemic: The divine and human are contrasted (str. 8, 10, 16, 22); investigation of the nature of Christ is identified with Satan (str. 19). These themes are more fully developed in the fourteenth hymn.

12

On the melody, "I shall sing if it is lawful"

- 1 Our Lord labored and went out to the contest
not to use force
but to be victorious in conflict.
Therefore he hungered, and by fasting he conquered
that one who is justified by eating.

Refrain: Blessed is He Who humbled the pride of Satan.

- 2 The evil one saw an opportunity in [His] hunger;
he demanded that He make stones into bread.¹⁵⁹

159. Cf. Matt. 4.2–4.

HYMN 12

- [Satan] became a stone among stones;¹⁶⁰
 His heart trembled when he saw that He was ■ craftsman
 and [yet] He defeated him in a debate.¹⁶¹
- 3 This [thought] came upon the evil one,
 "If He is divine and He is hungry,
 how will he regard me if I say,
 'Make the stones bread and be nourished'?
 Why will he bear the burden of His hunger?"
- 4 Blind was the evil one in his pride and his question,
 for if He were God, as he said,
 it escaped his notice that God does not hunger.
 He approached to make [Him] err, but erred himself,
 for he did not discern what he said.
- 5 [Satan] remembered questioning the house of Adam;
 by his inquiry he persuaded;
 he leapt from the inquiry to the explanation;
 he asked, disputed, explained and conquered.
 Here he asks and fails.
- 6 He lifted Him up and stood Him on the pinnacle¹⁶²
 as a symbol of the height of pride,
 as a type of the depth of the Fall.
 He lifted Him up to pride as He ascended
 to lower Him to the Fall as He descended.
- 7 He was blind in this again as in that:
 for if the psalm is fulfilled concerning Him:
 "With his pinions," it is written there, "that he might save you."¹⁶³
 Indeed, unable to fall is the bird
 under whose pinions the air is like the earth.¹⁶⁴
- 8 He sought a pretext by which to make Him fall
 [to see] whether He was divine or human
 to know which is the way to go,

160. That is, Satan was reduced to silence by Jesus' reply.

161. Although Jesus is a workman, a carpenter, he is able to defeat Satan in a battle of wits. In contrast to much of the Greco-Roman tradition of despising those who work with their hands, Ephrem delights in finding positive views of workers and their work, as in the previous hymn. Further, cf. Nat. 8.11 and note ad loc.

162. Matt. 4.5-7.

163. Ps. 91.

164. Cf. Virg. 11.1.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- so that if He were God, he would find out,
and if human, he would lead Him astray.
- 9 This was the work of our Athlete
Who did not let him know there that He was God.
For if he had known He was God
from the beginning, he would have fled
and would have spoiled the completion.
- 10 While he was leading into error, error entered upon him.
For he was unable to know He was God,
nor again was he able to investigate His being human.
For not as God did He exalt Himself
nor as human did He lose His footing.
- 11 For upon the sanctuary he lifted Him up
to convince Him that a human could become
god from the house of Divinity,
as he convinced Adam a human could
become god from that tree.
- 12 He remembered that the foreparents listened to him;
his counsels were a trick for youth,¹⁶⁵
but sagacity came to overpower him.
His temptations were like a coronation
for Wisdom Who came to humble him.
- 13 He lifted Him up and set Him on a mountain,¹⁶⁶
yet he did not call Him by the name to make Him proud,¹⁶⁷
as if he had become persuaded that He was needy.
- He was startled and offered Him a gift
so that the gift would bring Him to worship.
- 14 With schemes He blinded the schemer,
and instead of being confused, He remained quiet¹⁶⁸
like one who knows that [Satan] is deceitful.
Since One is worshipped by all, the Lord of all,
He showed that acts of worship are suitable [only] for Him.
- 15 Upon this foundation of the beginning

165. Ephrem evidently shared the view that Adam and Eve were children and hence more easily deceived by Satan. Cf. Nat. 7.11, 26.8 and notes ad loc.

166. Cf. Matt. 4.8–10.

167. Satan does not address Jesus as Son of God this time, cf. Matt. 4.

168. A pun on *blbl*, "to be confused," and *bbl*, "to remain quiet."

HYMN 12

- our Lord built and erected His triumphs.
 For although the deceiver changed his opinion,
 he did not alter truth with him
 Truth was pleased, and deceit was dispersed.
- 16 Therefore the factions in the contest mocked him,
 since in the beginning he made Him God,
 but he made Him human in the end.
 In the beginning he had made Him worshipped,
 in the end he made Him a worshipper.
- 17 The evil one remembered that he asked Him for food,
 and he thought He was impoverished since He did not give.
 On the other hand, he gave Him a gift,
 and he saw that, like a king, He did not take [it].
 He began with the two [alternatives], but he was disappointed.
- 18 Blind in his pride is cunning¹⁶⁹
 to try to exchange his possessions for worship.
 Since he considered Him poor, He showed His greatness,
 Whose grace is more abundant than [the evil one's] wares,
 Who by worship would purchase all He [already] possessed.
- 19 For all these things this was his punishment
 that instead of his knowing, he was known.
 Our Lord called him Satan,¹⁷⁰
 but he did not know what to call Him.
 He was furious that he came to investigate, but was investigated.
- 20 Human labor in weariness
 by discovery is turned to rest.
 The evil one who labored and investigated was exhausted,
 and the more he failed to attain, [the more] he was tormented.
 In discovery would be peace of soul.
- 21 He labored to ask or give Him [a choice of] the two things
 in order to know whether He was empty or full,
 but not as one full did He give to him
 nor as one empty did He take from him;
 his confusion was worse for him than his failure.

169. The Syriac word meaning "cunning" is an abstract noun, which is feminine, but because it represents the devil, Ephrem changes to the masculine pronoun in the next line.

170. Matt. 4.1.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 22 He answered, saying to himself,
"I have spoiled it that I made Him proud
that I have called Him the Son of God.
To act as God He is not able;
to sin as human He was ashamed.
- 23 "I should have remembered that even the first Adam,
had I made him proud as a lord,
in his pride would have scorned honor
so that it would not seem that the tree was better than he;
his pride would have become a protector.
- 24 "On account of this, I extolled the tree
in order by it to diminish man.
When he saw his smallness, he would hold [himself] in contempt
and run like a child for shame
and go toward the tree that was greater than he.
- 25 "[But] this one fled because of the praise.
[Pride] brings the rebellious into subjection without a staff.
The corrupt man puts on the bridle of modesty
when praised by an upright man;
his pride impedes the running of his course.
- 26 "This one fled because I made him proud,
for neither was He capable of falling
nor did He hold sinning in contempt.
I called Him God, and He would have sinned
Therefore He fled into the scriptures.
- 27 "Shame enters by praise
so that if one calls a feeble man eminent,
he is not able to make [himself] eminent;
again, to make [himself] base he is ashamed.
I cunningly forced Him to flee.
- 28 The Honored One made pleasant what is considered insignificant,
nor . . . for them to see it,
nor . . . for it to bend,
nor for them to mock at Him . . .
that He should be without the shame of His ignominy.
- 29 . . .
- 30 The evil one fled from Him for awhile.

HYMN 12

In the time of the crucifixion he arrived,
and by the hand of the crucifiers he killed Him
so that He fell in the contest with death
to conquer Satan and death.

This is the first in the sub-collection of eighteen hymns on the same melody, "Blessed are you, Ephrata!" Their subject is the presence of Christ in scripture and in nature, focussing especially on subjects drawn from the New Testament. The first two hymns concern the temptation of Christ, as recounted by Matthew.

At the beginning of the hymn Ephrem seeks to establish natural links not only between the sufferings of Christ and the defeat of Satan but also between the daily struggle of the individual Christian and the conquest of the evil one. To this end he portrays the ascetics as directly attacking Satan through their fasting (str. 1, 3-4). Whereas sinners delight him (str. 6) and heretical speculations and disputation among Christians give him pleasure (str. 8-9), virtuous behavior deprives him (str. 7). The sufferings of Christ at the instigation of Satan redound to his defeat in ironically suitable ways (str. 2-3, 5, 10-11).

Throughout the hymn Ephrem uses the image of the public debate, the *Agon*, to analyze the confrontation of Christ with Satan (cf. str. 2 and 16). By the three temptations Satan intends to discover whether Christ is divine or human (str. 17). His attempt fails. Not only does he not find out who Christ is, but he himself is easily identified (str. 19). Satan becomes confused (str. 21). In the Garden of Eden he was able to conquer by his powers of persuasion, but here he fails (str. 5). Whereas the youth of Adam and Eve was no match for his cunning, the divine Wisdom easily outwits him (str. 11-12). Ephrem faults Satan's logic: If Christ is divine and so able to change stones to bread, He would not really be hungry (str. 4). Furthermore, Satan does not realize that Christ already possesses all he is offering in exchange for worship (str. 18). Finally Ephrem imagines for us the flawed reasoning of Satan after the encounter: His mistake must have been in addressing Christ as Son of God (str. 22); Adam would also have fled temptation if he had made him feel proud of his humanity (str. 23-24); Satan's praise made Christ feel ashamed to sin and yet, not being divine, He had been unable to change the stones to bread; thus He fled (str. 22, 25-27). Only at the moment of the crucifixion will Satan

HYMN 13

realize the divinity of Christ. If had known at this moment of the temptation, he would not have returned to kill Christ on the cross, thus being conquered by Christ along with death according to the divine plan (str. 30).

13

To the melody "Blessed are you, Ephrata!"

- 1 All temptations surround the tempter of all
who dared tempt You.
Fasts and . . . are his great downfall:
with long fasts youths rack him;
Anchorites surround him and tear him to bits;
apostles torment him with their bones.
Bound with prayers, he is cast
into Gehenna before Gehenna's time.

Refrain: Praise be to our Justice!

- 2 Cast down is he who lifted You up on the cross,
who mixed vinegar for You, by whom You were [slain].
Bitter in his mouth is the gall You drank;¹⁷¹
in his heart is the spear that struck You.¹⁷²
At a thief's right hand he crucified You,¹⁷³ but he was defrauded:
the Slain One slayed him who had slain us.
In the Pharisees and scribes he mocked You,¹⁷⁴
but he has been made a mockery in the whole world.
- 3 Afflicted with a great thirst is he who gave You
a reed with gall to drink.
He recalls his cakes and libations,
he who became fat and burst from corpulence.
He sees the captive departing;
he sees his life diminishing.

171. John 19.29f. Cf. Mark 15.36 et par.

172. John 19.34.

173. Mark 15.27 et par.

174. Mark 15.31 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Abstainers from wine diminish his abundance,
and he approaches extinction.

- 4 Accursed is he! If someone abstain from meat,
[the Devil's] own flesh wastes away until he makes him stumble.
His blood, too, is drained when he is unable
to douse the faster with wine.

If he does not see our passion inflamed,
in an oven he is tormented and burned.

In a great stove [he is burned]
if he sees human desire tamed.

- 5 Our killer killed You and was killed.

With nails You fastened him, while he crucified You.

With the thorns that crowned You, he was mocked.¹⁷⁵

With the rod that struck You, he was beaten.

When he spat, his spittle fell on his own face.

He spat at You to his own shame.

You stripped off his graven images in which he clothed himself,
the despicable one who stripped you of your garments.

- 6 If he finds one who is abusive,
he takes delight all day.

Again, if he hears the sound of quarreling,
he enters there as if to a wedding feast.

His daily repast is hatred;

his usual supper is spite;

jealousy is his drink;

murder is his butcher, envy his baker.

- 7 If he goes without hearing the sound of mockery,
he becomes deaf.

If he sees no licentious behavior,
he becomes blind.

If he sees the estranged in harmony,
he is like one who has lost his other half.

If he sees friends, sorrow rests upon him
that he saw love on earth.

- 8 His tambourines and cymbals by you were abolished,
and his dancing and lamentations faded.

175. Mark 15.16–20 et par.

HYMN 13

[So] he works on us and divides us by inquiry.
He made us like a lyre that he might be comforted by us.
He played his wishes on us to refresh himself,
his tales and inquiries to make himself glad
In the investigation of hidden things he sang with our tongue
the song of his pleasure.

- 9 The contentious were led astray, and the investigators rose up,
boisterous and contentious.
The idols have been overthrown, but behold the apostates
who have named and multiplied all the gods.
Freedom who sells her freedoms
serves a multitude of lords.
Blessed is he who blots out his promissory note
with his tears.

- 10 In the wilderness he tempted You, and his feasts and festivals
in the wilderness have disappeared.
On the mountain he tempted You, Lord, with worship,
and mountains are no longer places of his worship.
Since he stood You up on the top of the Temple,¹⁷⁶
You have overthrown the top of his temples.
The hunter was fooled;
in the trap set for You he was caught unawares.

- 11 By the stone [with which] he tempted You¹⁷⁷ were broken
the stones that he carved for emptiness.
Since he dared to say to You, "Throw Yourself down!"¹⁷⁸
because of You he fell down and perished.
The One falling down cast down
the one who had come to cast down the One from above.
Satan led Him up
unaware that the Lowly One Who went up would cast him down
from the height.

176. Matt. 4.5 et par.

177. Matt. 4.3 et par.

178. Matt. 4.6 et par.

14

Ephrem frequently accuses the Arians of a love of disputation and divisiveness. The prominence of this idea here probably indicates an anti-Arian intent (esp. str. 1–5). Rather than theological argumentation, the weapon of choice for the Christian is the simple quotation of scripture, “the armor forged by Moses” (str. 1.7–8). Jesus Himself used this method not only against his Jewish adversaries (str. 5) but, more importantly, against Satan (str. 2). The themes of an athletic contest between Christ and Satan (str. 9) and the hunt (str. 10–14) are both prominent throughout the hymn. The latter is associated with scriptural argument through the metaphor of the bow of the Old Testament and the three arrows of scriptural quotations shot by Jesus in his answers to Satan (esp. 10, 11, 14). As in the previous hymn, Ephrem finds it ironic that Satan unwittingly chose symbols of the power of Christ—stones, bread and kingship—to tempt him (str. 6, 7, 9, 11).

14

The same melody

- 1 Blessed are you, wilderness, in which
the conqueror of all struggled with the captor of all.
One is [Christ] who deprived him of his armor and his treasure
and snatched his captives and bound and left him.
O his deceits that were exposed and defeated!
He put on simplicity and conquered and confused him.
He conquered him with the armor
forged by Moses for the simple and innocent.

Refrain: Glory be to Your victory!

- 2 Blessed is the one who sees that even the Omniscient One
conquered the crafty one by quotations [of scripture].

HYMN 14

He merely quoted again and again, and the evil one wailed
to see that He took refuge in simplicity.

For as a fish is at ease in water,
so Satan is in the disputation of controversy.
If there is no controversy, and if strife fails,
he flickers and is extinguished.

- 3 For the One who gave simplicity in His Testaments
was not weak.

For He gave truth against error.
The evil one saw truth and was afraid.

So he formed strife, gave it to us, and over us prevailed
the inquiries that make hatred grow.

Our perverse generation should be ashamed of the harm
it increases by its inquiries.

- 4 The One who said that by light
darkness was defeated, and death by life,
taught that envy is conquered by love,
and by his scripture deceit is transformed into wisdom.
Blessed is one who arms the tongue with Your word,
who quotes from what is Yours to Your adversary.
Our Lord, let us gaze upon You,
Who from Moses quoted to the evil one in Your temptation.

- 5 You have questioned, my Lord, and You have also been questioned
in order to provide a type to the disputants.
Your reasoning conquered the Sadducees,
and your argument reduced even the Pharisees to silence.¹⁷⁹
From scripture You quoted to the evil one.
to show how much strength is hidden in it.
Our pride is not able to put on
the armor of Your humility.
- 6 With stones Satan tempted
the Stone that gave drink to the people,¹⁸⁰
the Stone that was living bread,¹⁸¹

179. Mark 12.28–34 et par.

180. 1 Cor. 10.4, cf. Num. 20.11. On Christ the Stone or Rock, cf. Nat. 24.19, and Murray, Symbols, 206–12.

181. John 6.25–59.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- the Stone that shattered the great image.¹⁸²
 He set out to tempt it and feared not
 since he is blind in understanding and senseless.
 Instead of the image You shattered Satan,
 the cause of all images.
- 7 Whoever looked saw You, Our Lord,
 standing on the peak,
 The perfect Stone that went up and stood
 upon the Stone that fools rejected.¹⁸³
 Cunning Satan led You up;
 without discerning, he made You stand on Your symbol.¹⁸⁴
 The wonder to see: the symbol and its prototype,
 the truth and its shadow.¹⁸⁵
- 8 Up onto the high mountain Satan led the lowly One;
 upon the height he set Him up.¹⁸⁶
 There, as if in a balance, were weighed
 humility and pride.
 The proud one was justly overthrown;
 the Lowly One, exalted, overthrew him.
 For You, our Lord, Satan, who tempted You,
 rendered Your symbols.
- 9 On the mountain Satan tempted Our Lord [with kingship].
 and in mockery he gave Him [as king] to the Gentiles.
 With the word the reality came to exist
 for [Satan] returned [the Gentiles] to his conqueror.
 In the contests of the public games, the crown
 belongs to the one judged right to take it.
 [Satan] was not constrained by force,
 for our Lord took [the crown] justly.
- 10 Blessed is He who stood firm and put to shame
 the enemy of the age even as He looked on.
 His own traps lifted him up; his own snares and nooses caught him.

182. Dan. 2.34.

183. Ps. 118.22, Matt. 21.42, Luke 20.17, Acts 4.11, Rom. 9.33, 1 Pet. 2.7.

184. The Stone of Dan. 2.34 becomes a mountain, Dan. 2.35.

185. Syriac: *r'z' wtpnkb šrr' wtlb*. The phrase is chiasitic; i.e., the symbol and shadow are equivalent, prototype and truth are equivalent. In this example, it is clear that the prototype, *tpnk'*, is superior to the symbols, despite its later place in time; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 251f.

186. Literally, "led Him up and put Him."

HYMN 14

- His shafts, his loops, his nets bound him.
From the quiver of Moses You borrowed;
You took three arrows from Your servant.
His testament was the bow
by which You shot arrows at our murderer.
- 11 The arrow he shot at You was the bread for which he asked,
symbol of the greed of Adam.
With bread he tempted the Sustainer of all,
Who by His fasting healed gluttony.
. . . Satan . . .
His disciples . . . the bridegroom was reclining
He who did not want to change stones
changed water at Cana.¹⁸⁷
- 12 The evil one thought that [Jesus], cast down from the height,
would fall and cease to exist.
He provoked Him to cast Himself down since he thought
that from fright He did not allow Himself
to fall from the top of the Temple.
But since He rejected him and did not fall,
the evil one fell from his height—unforced,
when he perceived the Lowly One.
- 13 That bitter one filled his bow and took his stand
against Our Lord, the Sweet One.
Seeing that He put on a weak body, an infirm nature,
[Satan] erred and was deceived about Him.
The evil one saw His armor and trusted
that it was the armor of the vanquished Adam.
Great is his disgrace that by the very armor by which he conquered
his pride was defeated.
- 14 The evil one who shot a blunt arrow at You
became a target for sharp arrows.
You shot at him the arrow of humility
and two others of self-possession.
These were holy arrows, driven
into his unclean, stopped-up ears.
Avenged were the corruptions

187. John 2.1–12.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

of the corruptor of the simple obedience of the household of
Adam.¹⁸⁸

188. Cf. Virg 12.12. The manuscript adds, "The two hymns on the temptation and contention of Satan to the melody of 'Blessed are you, Ephrata,' are completed."

15

Although ■ postscript identifies the subject of this hymn as John the Baptist and “John the lesser,” its content is broadly baptismal. It is a series of blessings addressed to John the Baptist (str. 1–2), the Jordan River (str. 3), John the Evangelist (str. 4–5), and Simon Peter (str. 6–7), followed by curses addressed to Caiaphas (str. 8) and Judas (str. 9–10). In addition to the attention given to the baptism of Jesus by John, the recognition of the titles and role of Jesus by the figures praised or blamed provides a confessional theme appropriate to baptism.¹⁸⁹

John the Baptist acknowledged that the baptism to be offered by Jesus was greater than his own (str. 1–3). John the Evangelist, identified with the beloved disciple as well as with the apostle John, deserves recognition for identifying Jesus with the Word of God (str. 4–5). Because Peter, “tongue” of the apostles, called Jesus Messiah and Son of God (Matt. 16.17), he was assigned a special leadership among the apostles (str. 6–7). Even the sons of Zebedee are blessed for perceiving the role Jesus as future Judge, although their request is unfulfilled (str. 7). But Caiaphas who unwittingly stated that Jesus would suffer for the sake of all people, is cursed (str. 8). By his despair and ignominious death, Judas provides a negative example of a witness to Christ regardless of his own intentions (str. 9–10).

15

The third [hymn] on the same melody

- 1 Blessed are You, even You, a barren woman's son,¹⁹⁰
whose hand was made worthy to be placed upon His head.
You baptized the Baptizer Who baptized the Gentiles

189. For a similar theme using the infancy narratives, cf. Nat. 6.

190. Luke 1.7.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

with a flash of fire and the Holy Spirit.¹⁹¹

Blessed is your discernment that trembled and did not approach
and your intellect that was commanded and did not resist.

The heavens were divided,¹⁹² the Watchers were amazed and gave
glory
that the Purifier of all was baptized.

Refrain: Praise to your priesthood!

- 2 Blessed are you, the greatest of the prophets
all of whom desired him from a distance.¹⁹³
They longed for but did not see the Messiah, the Son,
but you placed your hand on His head.
Clothed in the Law, you exhibited zeal;
arrayed in the Messiah, you showed mercy.¹⁹⁴
In you descended and came Elijah, who has not come [otherwise],
whom you, in fact, represented.¹⁹⁵
- 3 Blessed are you, little Jordan River,
into which the Flowing Sea descended and was baptized.
You are not equal to a drop of vapor
of the Living Flood that whitens sins.
Blessed are your torrents, cleansed by His descent.
For the Holy One, Who condescended to bathe in you,
descended to open by His baptism
the baptism for the pardoning of souls.¹⁹⁶
- 4 Blessed are you, too, chaste youth,
whom your Lord held like a child.¹⁹⁷
He loved and cherished the chaste youth
in whom was hidden the pearl.¹⁹⁸

191. Matt. 3.11, Luke 3.16, cf. Mark 1.8.

192. Mark 1.10 et par.

193. Cf. Nat. 1.12f., 20–60.

194. For Ephrem, John the Baptist is the pivotal figure in the transition from the justice of the Old Testament and the mercy of the New, cf. Martikainen, *Gerechtigkeit*, 79–83; and for his related role as transmitter of the Old Testament priesthood to Jesus, cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 69–82.

195. Cf. John 1.19–28.

196. Rather than being cleansed by the water of John's baptism, Jesus cleanses the waters of the Jordan and transforms the baptism of John from type to reality by bringing the Spirit; cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 69–82, 92f.

197. John 13.23–25.

198. On virginity as the pearl of great price, cf. Virg. 2.4–5, 2.10, 3.12. For another symbolic use of the pearl, cf. Virg. 11.9.

HYMN 15

- O Virginity, He came down and lifted you up;
 before the Watchers, upon his breast He exalted you.
 Without effort the Watchers gave the gift,
 but by struggle you gave it.
- 5 Blessed are you, enriched by love, the key
 of the treasury you happened upon.
 The treasury had never been opened;
 silence was its seal, but your voice opened it.
 Blessed is your mouth that composed for us, "He is the Word."¹⁹⁹
 You explained the mute [word] to restrain us.
 "God is the Word" is reality for the diligent,
 vexation for the inquirers.
- 6 Blessed are you, too, Simon Peter,
 holder of the keys that the Spirit forged.²⁰⁰
 Great is the word and inexpressible.
 that above and below binds and looses.
 Blessed are the flocks He gave you;²⁰¹ how much they have
 increased!
 For you fastened the cross upon the water.²⁰²
 The flock in its love gave birth to every sort of
 virgins and chaste ones.
- 7 Blessed are you who became head
 and tongue for the body of your brothers.
 The body is a composite²⁰³ made of the disciples.
 The sons of Zebedee were its eyes;
 blessed are those two who, seeing His judgment seat,
 asked their Master for theirs.²⁰⁴
 By Simon is heard the revelation from the Father—
 [Simon], the unshakeable Rock.²⁰⁵

199. John 1.1.

200. Matt. 16.19. Simon Peter is also the recipient of priestly power transmitted to Jesus from Simeon the prophet as well as from John the Baptist, cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 51–55, 73–78, esp. 77f.

201. John 21.15–17.

202. Cf. Matt. 14.28–33 and John 21.7, and Saber, *Theologie*, 55.

203. *mrkbt'*, "composite," is the same as the word for "chariot," a subject of speculative interest in rabbinic Judaism and one known to Ephrem, cf. Virg. 21.10.

204. Mark 10.35–45 et par.; cf. Virg. 26.13.

205. Matt. 16.13–18. On Peter as Rock in Ephrem and Aphrahat, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 212–18. Ephrem's treatment of Peter here relies almost entirely on Matthew and John. For a

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 8 But you, woe to you, Caiaphas,
whose mouth was the herald of truth.²⁰⁶
This is the worker who labored and became weary.
but instead of a wage he sustained a loss.
The paymaster cried out that he was rejected
who prophesied without being hired.
The fruit of the blessing has been plucked
from the accursed by the obedient.
- 9 But you, woe to you, cache of stolen goods,
false disciple, servant of silver!
You surrendered the treasure, the treasure of life,
hidden in the wealth of the Gentiles.
Woe to your eyes that looked at Him but were not ashamed,
and to your mouth that kissed Him and feared not!²⁰⁷
Perfidy was in your mouth,
treachery in your greeting, the noose upon your neck.
- 10 Woe to the despicable chief of tares
rejected and expelled by the pure heap of grain.
As in a furnace the wheat bread
separated and ejected him from its presence.
A tree bore him a friendship;
the bitter one burst open with his hatred.
Oppressed by the burden of the stolen silver,
he burst open, fell and perished.²⁰⁸

discussion of these New Testament materials, cf. *Peter in the New Testament*, ed. R. E. Brown, K. P. Donfried, J. Reumann (New York, 1973), esp. 75–108, 129–48.

206. John 11. 49–52.

207. Mark 14.43–45 et par.

208. Ephrem has combined elements of Matt. 27.3–5 with Acts 1.18. A postscript adds, “Finished is one hymn on John the Baptist and John the lesser.”

16

In this hymn Ephrem emphasizes the importance of recognizing Christ and enjoying his blessings, especially in the Eucharist, rather than engaging in speculative theological scrutiny of the nature of the Son (esp. str. 4–6). He has surrounded this characteristic anti-Arian theme with New Testament materials illustrative of the open confession of Christ. The hymn begins with blessings pronounced on the two towns associated with the start of Jesus' ministry: Nazareth, where he spent his childhood; and Cana, where his public ministry began (str. 1–2). New Testament personages are blessed apparently with a view toward the inscrutability of God's ways as in the case of Zacchaeus (str. 3) and the cured demoniac (str. 6). Or they are blessed for the boldness of their statements as in the case of the blind man at Jericho (str. 7) and Nathanael (str. 8–9). Finally, a second Adam typology is elaborated (str. 10).

16

- 1 Blessed are you, Nazareth, hated by the [Jewish] people,²⁰⁹
by the name of our King your name is made beautiful.
An Heir grew up Who by His name clothed Himself in you,
for He was also called "Nazarene."²¹⁰
Blessed are your marketplaces that cultivated the body
of Him who cultivated minds by His Word.
A miracle in Nazareth—
that the Cultivator of all came down and grew up with infants.

Refrain: Glory to the One Who sent Him!

- 2 Blessed be you, Cana, for your bridegroom,
whose wine ran out, invited the Heavenly Bridegroom.²¹¹

209. Cf. John 1.46.

210. Matt. 2.23.

211. John 2.1–12; cf. Nat. 4.195.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

He invited the Inviter Who invited the Gentiles
to the new wedding feast and to life in Eden.
Blessed are your guests who exulted in His blessing,
and your vessels that were filled at His word.²¹²
In you heavenly graces were first brought to bloom,
shining forth for the first time.²¹³

- 3 Blessed are you, hidden little man,
for he came from on high to stay in your house.²¹⁴
The treasure entered, the Holy Treasure,
and scattered the hoards gathered by injustice.²¹⁵
Blessed is your wealth that He sowed so that it might be reaped,
and your possessions dispersed to be handed over [to the poor].
He had you come down from the tree you had gone up,²¹⁶
and he saved you by His wood.

- 4 Blessed are you, O wilderness, for upon His tables
our Lord wove for you a crown of silence.
Who that wishes to scrutinize his Creator
is able to scrutinize the bread that multiplied?²¹⁷
Blessed is the one who eats His blessing and does not scrutinize
Him
and enjoys His delights and does not dispute about His begetting.²¹⁸
Our hunger reproves us, for humans need bread
but not to scrutinize it.
- 5 Our Lord has become our living bread,²¹⁹
and we shall delight in our new cup.
Come, let us then eat it without investigation,
and without scrutiny let us drink his cup.
Who disdains blessings and fruits
and sits down to investigate their nature?
A human being needs to live. Come let us live and not die
in the depth of investigation.

212. John 2.7.

213. John 2.11.

214. Luke 19.1–10.

215. Luke 19.7–8.

216. Luke 19.5.

217. Exod. 16.1–36 et par.

218. This is part of Ephrem's standard anti-Arian polemic.

219. Cf. John 6.48–51.

HYMN 16

- 6 Blessed also are you, whoever you are
from whom our Lord made to emerge
a swarm of demons that had settled in you.²²⁰
Ask the scholars who scrutinize the Son
where in you the thousands of demons lived.
Blessed are your disorderly voices that have been silenced
and your shattered limbs that rest.
In you is portrayed the world, stripped and contemptible
but made chaste by the One Who makes all chaste.
- 7 Blessed are you, too, courageous blind man
whose great boldness enlightened you.²²¹
For if you had been silent as you were admonished,
silence would have kept you in darkness.
Blessed is your boldness for in it you also offer a type,
that the sinner, if he be bold, will obtain mercy.
[God] entered and left ten thousand talents right away
[for] the petitioner's boldness.
- 8 Blessed are you too, son of Hebrews,
whom your Lord called Bar Israel—
a new man not clothed in the guile of the serpent,
a simple man in whom Adam was reproached.²²²
The sound of the gospel you heard in the garden,
while Adam in Eden heard the just voice.
From next to the fig tree Nathanael was called,
clothed in new [garments].
- 9 Blessed are you whom they told among the trees,
“We have found Him Who finds all,
Who came to find Adam who was lost,
and in the garment of light to return him to Eden.”²²³
The world in the symbol of the shade of the fig tree
is belabored as if in heavy shadow.
From beneath the fig tree as a symbol of the world, you emerged
to meet our Savior.

220. Mark 5.1–20 et par.

221. Mark 10.46–52 et par.; cf. HdP 5.7.

222. John 1.43–51, esp. 47.

223. On Adam's garment of light and other original attributes, cf. Nat. 5.4 and Virg. 3.2 and notes ad loc.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 10 Very sad was the Tree of Life
that saw Adam hidden from him.
Into the virgin earth he sank and was buried,
but he arose and shone forth from Golgotha.²²⁴
Humankind, like a bird pursued,
took refuge on it so it would arrive at its home.
The persecutor is persecuted,
and the persecuted doves rejoice in paradise.²²⁵

224. Matt. 27.53; for Adam buried at Golgotha, cf. E. A. Wallis Badge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London, 1927), 224–25.

225. The manuscript adds, "Finished is one hymn on Nazareth."

In this hymn Ephrem sets forth the city of Shechem as the type of the creation as well as of the church of the Gentiles. Just as Shechem was destroyed for the sake of avenging the rape of Dinah, the creation was destroyed through the sin of Eve. All this is the work of justice. But the work of grace also has its place. Because of the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus brought salvation to her city of Shechem. Although Ephrem does not state it explicitly here, it is clear elsewhere that the symmetry is completed in Mary, Mother of Jesus, the woman through whom the creation was restored to grace.

Just as the fallen creation is full of dead bodies, so also the city of Shechem and its surrounding hills contain the bones of leaders of the Israelites: Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar son of Aaron. These three variously represent Jesus and his threefold messiahship: of prophet, king and priest. Other parallels are their similar or identical names: Joshua's name is identical with Jesus; Jesus is Bar Joseph, son of Joseph. Just as Joshua and Eleazar distributed the inheritance of the land to the tribes of Israel, Jesus offers the inheritance of salvation, refreshment and rest to all.

Finally, Jesus is portrayed as if he were a fourth-century pilgrim visiting the graves of the three "just men" buried at Shechem. Because they, the dead, and the Samaritan woman, the living, longed for the salvation brought by Jesus, he came to their Gentile city and saved it. Around the well of Jacob, Ephrem informs us, is built a church on which the words of Jesus to the Samaritan woman are inscribed—a message for the entire church of the Gentiles.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

17

On Shechem on the previous melody

- 1 Blessed are you, Shechem,²²⁶ between grace
and justice wondrously set.

Because of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, you were judged.

The circumcised destroyed you, made you a grave.²²⁷

Blessed is He who came to you, Son of the Gracious One, and
consoled you,

for the sons of justice had drawn their swords against you,

Since on a woman's account they killed, buried and concealed you,
by a woman you were resuscitated.²²⁸

Refrain: Blessed is the One Who . . . Shechem.

- 2 Blessed are you, O Shechem,
in whom is portrayed all creation, for one who understands.
Through Eve the serpent began to destroy the earth,
full of corpses, as a type for you.
Blessed is the creation! He Who imprinted and portrayed
the two of you, one on the other, revived [creation] in your symbol.
You, O Shechem, are the beginning and the parable
of the church of the Gentiles.
- 3 Blessed are you, blessed [city], for on your mountain was
Joshua Bar Nun like a sweet spice.²²⁹
Therefore you were not defrauded of the fulfillment
of Jesus the true name.²³⁰
Blessed is your beauty that the names adorn,
the name of the servant and the name of his Lord.
Blessed are you, enviable one, for in your grave is Joshua,
and in your heart is our Lord.
- 4 Blessed are you, O Shechem, in whom is planted
even the pure tree of symbols.

226. Shechem, son of Hamor, could be addressed here, but the succeeding lines show that the city is meant.

227. Cf. Gen. 34.1–31.

228. The Samaritan woman at the well; cf. John 4.1–42.

229. Josh. 24.29f.

230. In Syriac, as in Hebrew, the names Joshua and Jesus are identical; cf. Nat. 1.31 and note ad loc.

HYMN 17

- Placed in you was Joseph,²³¹ who bore the types,
 and upon his limbs were the symbols of his Lord.²³²
 Blessed is your womb from which he peers out at us,
 Joseph . . . Bar Joseph imprinted.
 Who is able . . . to pluck from your branches
 the symbols of our Savior?
- 5 Blessed are you, O Shechem, among whose tribe is placed
 Eleazar, Son of Aaron.²³³
 Aaron was prevented from crossing the river;
 [Eleazar] entered, divided and distributed the inheritance.²³⁴
 Blessed are you in whom dwell triple symbols:
 even chiefs and prophets and priests.
 From above came to you the Threefold One²³⁵ in Whom
 the bones of your glorious men rejoiced.
- 6 Blessed are you, whose entire land flourishes
 with the bones of just men who portrayed the Son—
 blossoms plaited with their symbols,
 crowning the Son as He entered you.
 With them you crowned the King Who came to you,
 [the King] whom the mad one²³⁶ crowned with a crown of thorns.
 Who has ever seen symbols who from their graves
 crowned the victor?

231. Josh. 24.32.

232. The textual lacuna makes it difficult to be certain of the precise typological relation understood by Ephrem here, but it is perhaps only the fact that Jesus is Bar Joseph, son of Joseph, but cf. also Virg. 18.6.

233. Josh. 24.33.

234. Josh. 14.1—19.51.

235. *lyty* should be read as "threefold" rather than "third," the reference being to the threefold messiahship of Jesus as priest, prophet and king, cf. Virg 19.9. This seems Ephrem's intention more than the suggestions of Beck, cf. Epiph. 8.6 and CNis. 1.11.

236. Ephrem portrays Jesus as if he were a fourth-century pilgrim coming to Shechem to visit the graves of Joshua, Joseph and Eleazar. The gravesites to which Josh. 24.29—33 testifies, as well as the church built around the well of Jacob (cf. str. 10), are attested as pilgrimage sites in two fourth-century sources, the accounts of the Bordeaux pilgrim and Jerome. Whereas Jerome and others, following the tradition of Gen. 50.13, locate the grave of Joseph at Hebron, the Bordeaux pilgrim situates it at Shechem, Bord. 588.1 and Hier. epis. 108, cf. Wilkenson, *Pilgrims*, 38, n.92 and 51. Jerome, in describing the travels of Paula, recounts her veneration of sites on Mount Ephrem reputed to be the tombs of Joshua and Eleazar and her visit to the church constructed around Jacob's well, Jer. Epis. 108, cf. Wilkenson, *Pilgrims*, 51. Jerome also relates the church and well to John 4. Egeria also mentions a church associated with Melchizedek, possibly at Shechem, Eger. Itin. 13, cf. G.E. Gingras, trans. *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, ACW 38 (New York, 1970), 197f., n. 172.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 7 Among your tribe weary men found rest:
Joseph, Joshua and Eleazar.
In you also the weary Gentle One found rest.
Although tireless He became tired to give you rest.
Blessed is your well at which He found rest
Whose rest announced rest to you.
Blessed are you, restful one, for whom refreshment multiplies
in our Lord Who pours forth all.
- 8 Blessed are you that happened to have the treasures of bones
that the Lord came to visit.²³⁷
Heavenly treasures were the graves
full of the bones of just men.
Blessed are the graves of your just men who exulted
and the gates of your palaces that were opened.
Blessed are you, O Shechem, for the dead and the living
in you long for our Savior.
- 9 Blessed are you, O Shechem, in which the True One
disavowed His own words for the sake of your life:
"Go not in the way of pagans,
nor into a Samaritan city."²³⁸
Blessed are you, like Nineveh, absolved
by the Just One; He passed judgment but He saved it.
Jonah grieved over Nineveh's repentance
but in you our Lord rejoiced.
- 10 Blessed are you, O Shechem, for upon your well
today is built a holy church:
For behold, "I baptize with living water
for which your mouth asked there.
Whoever drank from your well thirsted again and returned to it;
My baptism needs no repetition."²³⁹
Blessed are you, O Shechem, upon whose well and church
His exact words are portrayed.²⁴⁰

237. Matt. 10.5.

238. Cf. Jon. 3.10–4.11, cf. Virg. 42–50, esp. 50.

239. Cf. John 4.1–15.

240. Other sources of the late fourth century mention the church, but not the inscription, cf. str. 8, above.

Ephrem continues his typological exegesis of the Jewish scriptures touching on the city of Shechem, stressing not only the fulfillment of the types in Christ but also his superiority to them. Jacob watering his flocks at Shechem anticipates Christ bringing salvation to the Gentiles (str. 1). The duplicitous demand of Dinah's brothers serves to teach a lesson against circumcision itself; the violence of their retribution is contrasted with the love of the covenant of the "Gentle One" who was slain (str. 2–3). Animal imagery is used to evoke the two levels of the story: The dove betrayed by the serpent represents at once the Shechemites deceived by Dinah's brothers and humankind betrayed by Satan. The pagans, represented by wolves and wild animals, are saved by the Lamb, Christ, while the Jewish people, the ewe, rejects him (str. 4). Yet the gift of salvation is not given to unregenerate pagans: Bar Hamor, Shechem, was a licentious man who was ultimately responsible for the destruction of the city; and the Samaritan woman, reproached by Jesus, is implicitly contrasted with the consecrated virgins of the church (str. 5).

The hymn ends with a rehearsal of the typological interpretation of the three men buried at Shechem or its vicinity. Since both the sons of Jacob and the Egyptians received Pharaoh's grain distributed by Joseph, and since Joseph was buried at Shechem, that city symbolizes the presence of both Jewish and Gentile Christians in the church (str. 6). When Joshua saved Rahab and her family, he anticipated Jesus' salvation of the Samaritan woman and her townspeople, which, in turn, represents the salvation of all the Gentiles (str. 7). Through a play on words, Eleazar and the Levitical priesthood are confirmed as the Jewish representatives of Jesus and his apostolic priesthood (str. 8). Finally, the burial at Shechem of these three Jewish antetypes of Jesus and Jesus' visit there are concrete evidence of the validity of Ephrem's typological exegesis, affirmed in principle by Matthew 13.52 (str. 9–10; cf. str. 6–8).

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

18

The same melody

- 1 Blessed are you, O Shechem, for from that well
Jacob had his mute flocks drink,
and from that church over the well
Christ had His flocks drink.
The flocks of Jacob have passed away and disappeared,
but the flock of Christ has grown and does grow.
The symbols were swallowed, and the shadows were completed;
by Jesus all is sealed.

Refrain: Blessed is He Who taught Shechem!

- 2 The deceitful brothers placed a condition on you,
a condition that became the cause of your death,
for they were unfaithful to their covenant.²⁴¹ Behold the True One
Who resembled Him and His promises.
Instead of the condition contrived by hatred,
behold the symbol devised by love.
Instead of slayers, behold the Slain One
Who was slain but gave you life by His death.
- 3 How much indeed the former generations were disturbed,
but by you, Gentle One, all was made peaceful.
Drunk with anger, they licked venom,
so that even the circumcised destroyed the circumcised.
O circumcision, put to shame by its advocates,
for this was not God's zeal crying out for it.
Its own sword reproved circumcision in Shechem
as a hater of humans.
- 4 O dove who trusted the serpent,
the Lamb has saved your simplicity,
for your wolves are represented by Him and were taught by Him.
They put on His humility and were reconciled with Him.
Woe to the Hebrew sheep²⁴² that butted Him;

241. Cf. Gen. 34.13–29.

242. Here and in the following line Ephrem plays on words via metathesis: *l'rb' 'bry'* and *pqrt . . . wprwqrnb*.

HYMN 18

the ewe raved at Him and in Him she lost her salvation.
But the wild animal, forgetting her customary behavior,
was tamed by Him.

- 5 Blessed are you, O Shechem, town of Jacob!
Jacob gave you to Joseph the just.²⁴³
Bar Hamor, that licentious man, destroyed you;
Joseph, the glorious, inherited you.
Since Bar Hamor seduced the daughter of Jacob and raped her,
the Holy One taught your daughter and instructed her in modesty.
Because of the One who was victorious, the virgins of your church
have won their crowns.
- 6 Blessed are you, O Shechem, . . . that proclaimed
symbols of . . . to the People and the peoples,
for even the proud circumcised men
came down to buy corn from the uncircumcised one.²⁴⁴
The symbol and its explanation are in your church
in which uncircumcised and circumcised dwell.
Indeed the Savior went to Joseph
to perfect his symbol in his city.²⁴⁵
- 7 He went again, to perfect the symbol hidden
in Joshua Bar Nun, who lived in your land.
For he saved Rahab the harlot
who had been the maelstrom of many men.²⁴⁶
Jesus the Most High freed your daughter
who had belonged to many men.²⁴⁷
Rahab saved only the household of her fathers,
but your daughter [saved] many.
- 8 He came, furthermore, to your land to perfect
the symbol hidden in Eleazar,
the priest who crossed over with Joshua²⁴⁸
and accompanied him as a symbol—

243. Cf. Gen. 33.19 and Josh. 24.32.

244. Pharaoh, cf. Gen. 42.

245. Jesus went to Shechem to Joseph's burial place as a sign that the church is for both Jews and Gentiles.

246. Josh. 2.1–21, 6.17–25.

247. Cf. John 4.16–18, but in the light of Virg. 22.12–13, perhaps the allusion here is to John 7.53–8.11.

248. Cf. Josh. 3.3–6 and 4.16–18.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

the symbol of the apostles who accompanied Jesus,²⁴⁹

Like the Levites, they were priests in the world.

Blessed are you, desirable one; in your symbols
the truths shine forth and are resplendent.

- 9 Blessings multiply for you, blessed one,²⁵⁰

. . . blessings bear your dead.

Behold . . . their bones . . .

Instead of bones . . . symbols in your womb.

Types shine forth and even bones are revived in those
who by deeds are saved by their Lord.

Blessed are you, O Shechem, for symbols and bones
thunder in your womb.

- 10 Even if all the tribes were in need

as the poor, your tribe would still be rich.

For "from his treasure he brought out something new
and something old," as it is written.²⁵¹

Blessed is your glorious crown! How enviable!

Precious jewels are on it and how fair they are!

Joseph and Joshua and the son of Aaron the priest,
our Lord and His heralds.

249. Depending on the vocalization, *lwy'* may mean either "companion" or "Levite."

250. The city of Shechem is addressed.

251. Cf. Matt. 13.52.

19

In this third hymn on the city of Shechem, Ephrem continues the theme of Shechem as the representation of the Gentile church, completing it with the introduction of bridal imagery. Rejected by Judah, Christ, the Light, has been joyfully accepted by Shechem (str. 1); the church of the Gentiles is the bride of Christ (str. 2). Expressing the intimate dwelling of God within the Gentile church in the language of the Pentateuch, Ephrem goes on to say that Jesus brought the Ark back to Shechem (str. 4–5). This adds a further dimension to his exegetical message for Semitic Christians like Ephrem who might trace their ancestry to one of the “lost tribes” of Israel, such as the tribe of Ephrem, more plausibly than to the tribe of Judah. He clearly has in mind the fact that Joshua was from the tribe of Ephrem. His brief allusion to Hosea makes it equally clear that he knows that Jereboam and Ahab were Ephremites, and that the prophet railed against the tribe of Ephrem as the worst of idolaters (str. 10). Regardless of all this and to the chagrin of the descendants of Judah, argues Ephrem, the threefold messianic promise has passed over to Shechem, to the church of the Gentiles, founded on the bones of Joseph, Joshua and Eleazar (str. 6–9).

19

The seventh on the same melody

- 1 Blessed are you, O Shechem, in which visited
the Light persecuted by the land of Judah.
Others approached and asked
the Fount of mercies to depart from their presence.²⁵²
Blessed are your children who entreated and surrounded
that treasure of glorious perfumes

252. Cf. Matt. 8.34.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

that they might inhale and be sated, and that the power of His
deeds
might permeate their senses.²⁵³

Refrain: Blessed is the city of Shechem!

- 2 Blessed are you, crowned Bride
into whom entered the Bridegroom Whom Zion hated.
The lame who had been cured rejoiced and danced in you;
the deaf shouted for joy; the mute sang praises.
Your inhabitants were numbered among those at the marriage
feast.²⁵⁴
Cities sang praises with hosannas to Him.
Zion's ears were sickened at your joyful shout,
for your voice reached her presence.
- 3 She carved an idol . . .
. . .
. . .
- 4 Among your tribe the Ark was set up again.
The Gentiles saw, but frightened and angry were
the circumcised; they persecuted their king, and He went out
and came to Shechem, full of Gentiles.
Among the tribe of Joshua he made the Gentiles cry out.
Among the tribe they were consoled by our Savior.
Gentiles rejoiced, but the Jewish people grew angry and jealous.
Praise to the Omniscient One!
- 5 Among your tribe was pitched the meeting tent,²⁵⁵
and all its festivals resounded in your land.
Who will raise you to greater honor than this
that God Himself should dwell in you?
Israel was envious of how greatly you were magnified,
for the Ark was among your tribe.
. . . the people . . .
That was sustained . . .
- 6 This . . . eagle

253. Cf. John 4.30, 39-42.

254. Probably an allusion to Matt. 21.1-14, rather than to John 2.1-11.

255. Josh. 18.1.

HYMN 19

and as a symbol he was solemnly borne.
 Among your tribe Eleazar was buried,²⁵⁶
 and inside your mountain, Joshua Bar Nun.²⁵⁷

A man . . . Ephrem . . .

Joshua Bar Nun . . . that glorified you . . .

Blessed are you, a standard with His legions.

His angels came down and surrounded him.²⁵⁸

- 7 Joshua Bar Nun gathered a congregation,
 and came carrying Joseph with great pomp;
 he placed him in you.²⁵⁹ From his bones
 wafted the smell of his victory.

A desirable blossom and a triumphant flower
 struggled with fire and extinguished it.

Who has even seen a blossom that surrounded
 itself with its glory?

- 8 O free [city] purchased for one hundred ewes²⁶⁰
 even your number is significant.

Your crown was sealed and your type completed.

your symbol perfected, your measure filled.

Promised Land, promised to Abraham,

the just bought their own inheritance with their money.

In them is symbolized their Lord Who bought His flocks with His
 Blood;

with His sufferings [He bought] His own possessions.²⁶¹

- 9 Who . . . you, O Shechem, among the tribe of Ephrem.
 The blessed women carried your remedy.

. . .

The heads of tribes . . . Ephrem

Your kingdom cries out with Joseph,

and with Eleazar your priesthood shouts joyfully,

and with Joshua your prophecy. Blessed are you, the tribe
 by which he clothes Himself in the three [offices].

256. Josh. 24.33.

257. Josh. 24.29f.

258. Like Jesus, cf. Mark 1.13 et par., Joshua was assisted by angels, cf. Josh. 5.13-15.

259. Exod. 13.19 and Josh. 24.32.

260. Gen. 33.19 and Josh. 24.32; Beck has noted that, like Ephrem, the Peshitta states the purchase price as one hundred ewes rather than one hundred pieces of gold.

261. Cf. Virg. 12.18.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 10 That . . . Ephrem's wage is dissipated,
for I have adorned you with your own crowns.
Indeed, I have not magnified the treasure of sweet spices;
the odor of his fragrant herbs wafted over me,²⁶²
for the name I bear, is beloved by you.
Recall me in the prayer of your church.
Ephrem is my name, and when Hosea cries out against me,
console me with your help.²⁶³

262. Hos. 4.17–5.14 et passim.

263. A postscript reads, "The three hymns about Shechem are completed."

20

This is the first of two hymns on the city of Ephrem, in which, according to John's gospel, Jesus took refuge just before His final return to Jerusalem. Ephrem sets forth an elaborate typological interpretation of this event, working on several levels simultaneously. First he enumerates three Old Testament types for flight under persecution: Jacob, Moses and Elijah (str. 2). Then he elaborates the conditions of Jesus' withdrawal to Ephrem. He argues that both the human opponents of Jesus in Jerusalem and Satan, despite their determination to kill Jesus, wished to avoid doing so on Passover—not only because of the potential for popular unrest, but especially to disguise the typology of Christ as the Passover Lamb (cf. the Paschal theology of John's gospel) (str. 3–5). However, just as the flight into Egypt in the Matthean infancy narrative was designed to show the typological link of Jesus to the Exodus (cf. Matt. 2.15), the flight of Jesus to Ephrem at the end of the ministry shows another aspect of the same Paschal mystery (str. 6).

The flight to the city of Ephrem should remind us of Jacob's blessing of Ephrem in Egypt. That blessing is symbolic in two respects: First, the crossed arms of Jacob are a type of the cross of Christ; second, this same gesture, in elevating the younger son over the older, shows the substitution of the Gentiles for the Jews as the recipients of the promises of God (str. 7–11). By placing the Gentile acceptance of Jesus at the entry into Jerusalem (str. 9), Ephrem justifies the apparent change of divine preference as the timely choice of the Divine Gardener who plucks the fruit in season (str. 11). The final strophe is a statement of the hymnist's belief that the symbols of the Creator's truth are to be found throughout the creation as well as in scripture.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

20

- The eighth hymn to the same melody
 1 Blessed are you, too, Ephrem, the city
 in which the Lord of cities was hidden.²⁶⁴
 On dry ground waves swelled against Him
 Who silenced the waves on the sea.²⁶⁵
 Blessed is your harbor that received with love
 the persecuted ship of disciples.²⁶⁶
 The sailor had seen your calm harbor
 and enriched you with His discourses.²⁶⁷

Refrain: Glory to the One Who sent You!

- 2 Jacob, when pursued, turned aside to Haran;²⁶⁸
 Moses, persecuted, turned aside to Midian;²⁶⁹
 even Elijah fled to Zarephath;²⁷⁰
 the uncircumcised received the circumcised.
 But blessed are you who became worthy of the Lord,
 Who was persecuted by His servants, the crucifiers.
 The Just One Who hid His all-scourging sceptre
 was persecuted in return.
 3 The wolves heard long before from John
 who called Christ the True Lamb,²⁷¹
 and they wanted to kill Him before the festival
 that He might not become the Paschal Lamb
 so they might forget the path forged

264. John 11.54.

265. Mark 6.45-52 et par.

266. Entry into the harbor is an image frequently found, along with other sailing imagery, in early Christian literature. For the Greek and Latin sources, cf. H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche, Die Ekklesiologie der Väter* (Salzburg, 1964), 243-48, 548-64; and J. Danielou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, trans. D. Attwater (London, 1964), 58-70. In the Syriac environment this language is applied to Christ, to Mary and other saints, the church and the sacraments, especially baptism, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 249-53, and E. Hambye, "The Symbol of the < < Coming to the Harbour>> in the Syriac Tradition," *OCA* 197, 401-11. For Mary as the harbor, cf. *Nat.* 9.4.

267. For another example of Christ as sailor, cf. *Virg.* 31.15.

268. *Gen.* 27.42-28.5.

269. *Exod.* 2.11-15.

270. *1 Kgs.* 17.8-10.

271. *John* 1.36.

HYMN 20

by the lamb that was slain in Egypt.²⁷²

But they handed down and bore the lambs with their symbols
to the True Lamb.

- 4 The evil one played a hidden trick on those
who were his visible harp:

"Let us not kill Him at the festival
lest there be a great clamor for Him."²⁷³

Satan saw the lamb and was alarmed,
and how greatly he feared His month and His day!
He hastened to kill Him before Nisan's moon
and its fourteenth day.

- 5 Our Lord, Who did not ever want to constrain
either our will or our freedom,²⁷⁴
kept His distance rather than oppose evil men.
When He had provided a place, he provided a type,
that when His day and month should arrive,
He might go to His glorious mystery.
To the city called . . .

. . .

- 6 Just as he went to Egypt as a child
to take His symbol from there,²⁷⁵
He set out in the end for the city of Ephrem
to go bearing His great symbol.
In Egypt He took refuge at the first;
in the city of the household of Ephrem at the last.
He began and ended: for Egypt the beginning,
for Ephrem the completion.

- 7 In Egypt were portrayed two symbols
when Jacob crossed his hands.²⁷⁶
How lovely the sight and how beloved the symbol,
how glorious the type and how clear the cross!
He crossed his arms and portrayed
the Crucified One and the glorious cross.

272. Cf. Exod. 12.

273. Mark 14.1–2 et par.

274. On the importance of free will, cf. Nat. 1.98, 4.140–42, Virg. 25.7 and notes ad loc.

275. Matt. 2.13–15.

276. Gen. 48.1–22, esp. 14. Cf. Murray, Symbols, 46.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Blessed is the child on whose head was portrayed
the all-life-giving cross.

- 8 That name was given to his town;
it was named Ephrem city,
so that the city also keeps Ephrem's name,
the symbol of its Lord entrusted to it,
so that to that blessed city
our Savior went to clothe Himself in
the great symbol portrayed in the name
of Ephrem in Egypt.
- 9 The cross portrayed gave the right of the first-born
to Ephrem, the symbol of the Gentiles,
those who went out to meet our Lord
when He returned from the city of Ephrem.²⁷⁷
Aramaecans glorified Him with their palm branches;
the circumcised were silent and [so] they were rejected.
The symbol has been revealed: The Gentiles have become the first-
born;
they were first with their hosannas.
- 10 [The text of this verse is very fragmentary.]
- 11 See: He, being omniscient, served
all of them in their seasons.
Even the laborers pluck fruits
in their seasons and their months.
The symbols of the Wise Laborer, too,
go with His seasons.
O Laborer Whose symbols were gathered,
Who is a reservoir of all symbols!
- 12 In every place, if you look, His symbol is there,
and when you read, you will find His types.
For by Him were created all creatures,
and He engraved His symbols upon His possessions.²⁷⁸
When He created the world,

277. Cf. John 12.12–15. Ephrem's characterization of the crowds as Gentiles is noted by Murray, *Symbols*, 46; For ■ suggestion of the thought process that leads him to this view, cf. Hayman, *Image*, 429.

278. Ephrem refers to the ancient custom of marking one's belongings, cf. *Nat.* 1.99, 12.3, 28.7 and notes ad loc.

HYMN 20

He gazed at it and adorned it with His images.²⁷⁹
Streams of His symbols opened, flowed and poured forth
His symbols on His members.

279. Here the "types" (*tʿwps*) are in scripture, while the "symbols" (*r'z*) and "images" (*ywqn*) are in nature, but Ephrem is not consistent in this usage, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 244, where he cites Azym. 4.22 with its *dmwt* in the Law, *ywqn* in the prophets, and *r'z* in nature.

21

This second hymn on the city of Ephrem develops further the themes of the previous hymn. As before, the starting point is the theme of Jesus' refuge in the city of Ephrem, dwelling this time on the peacefulness of that refuge and comparing it with the refuge of Christian ascetics in the desert (str. 1-2). Again, the flight into Egypt is invoked as a parallel, reinforced this time by comparison of Herod with Caiaphas, and the fact that Ephrem's mother was Egyptian (str. 3). Jesus took certain actions deliberately to fulfill the types: just as he went to Egypt and to Nazareth with typological intent, He went to Ephrem and to Bethany and, most of all, he died as the Passover Lamb on 14 Nisan (str. 4). The transfiguration, portrayed as another instance of taking refuge from Jewish persecution, provides another parallel to the flight to Ephrem (str. 5-6).

In the final strophes Ephrem seeks to demonstrate that Ephrem bar Joseph is an authentic type of Christ. Using the exegetical technique of gematria, he shows that the name of Ephrem is inherently related to the cross and to the Crucified One (str. 8). Further, his mother, Asenath, daughter of an Egyptian priest, represents the Gentile church; just as she loved her husband Joseph, the church of the Gentiles loves her husband, Jesus, the son of Joseph. Her numerous children, the Gentile Christians, are sealed with the cross at baptism (str. 9). Three crosses represent the mystical presence of Christ throughout the creation: in the heavenly chariot, in the human being, and in the earthly creation (str. 10). Ephrem is the recipient of a threefold blessing: Offered by his father Joseph to his grandfather, Jacob, he is blessed by Jacob and his city is crowned by Christ as His bride (str. 11).

21

The ninth on the same melody

1 Blessed are you, Ephrem, that in your city,

HYMN 21

that distant one, neighbor of the desert, companion of solitude,
the Lord of cities found rest.²⁸⁰

. . .

Blessed are your gates, blessed by His entry,
and your streets sanctified by His footsteps.
[Ephrem's] desert is the symbol of the desert of the world,
for it gave peace to the One Who gives peace to all.

Refrain: Blessed is He Who gladdens all.

- 2 Blessed are you, in whom rested the weary Lord,
and the persecuted community lived in your peace.
. . . her companions . . .
fish . . . from the dragons . . .
His lambs were consoled that there was no
Caiaphas chief of the wolves, the Sodomites.
In you [God] portrays a type for the ascetics who love
the all-liberating desert.
- 3 Into Egypt Mary fled from that king
drunk with the blood of the tribes,²⁸¹
and thus You fled to the city of Ephrem
from Caiaphas, drunk with rage.²⁸²
Zion slandered Him in the scribes;
Jerusalem persecuted Him in the priests.
In Egypt He was hidden, and he was concealed in Ephrem,
whose mother was an Egyptian.²⁸³
- 4 He went down to Egypt, fulfilled the symbol and returned.
He went to Nazareth for the sake of its symbol;²⁸⁴
likewise He went to create a symbol in Ephrem,
and in Bethany with a colt and the Gentiles.²⁸⁵
His symbols were passed down one to the next.
His prototypes received one from the other.

280. John 11.54.

281. Cf. Matt. 2.13–18.

282. Cf. John 11.49–53.

283. Gen. 41.45, 50–52.

284. Matt. 2.23.

285. Mark 11.1–11 et par., esp. Matt. 21.4f.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

In Nisan He completed the measure of all symbols
on the fourteenth²⁸⁶ day.

- 5 Simon, going up to Mt. Tabor,
lovely and undisturbed by the crucifiers,
persuaded the Lord, "It is good, my Lord,
for us to be here, without disturbers;
it is fitting for us with righteous men in tents;
it is peaceful for us with Moses and Elijah
rather than in the Temple full of the confusion
and the bitterness of the Jews."²⁸⁷

6 . . . Ephrem

. . .

. . . this city
is not among the cities of the Jews.
Where is the strife of the scribes?
Where are the threats of the priests?
Simon perhaps said, "The city is very quiet,
our Lord, let us stay."

- 7 For while all creatures gazed at Him,
they all gave Him their trust.
While the writings He read gazed at Him,
they gave Him books of their interpretations.
Again while Ephrem, that blessed city,
was looking at Him with joy,
he took from his head the symbol that crowned him
and offered it to the Conqueror.

- 8 If, moreover, you calculate the name of Ephrem,
it is three hundred thirty one.²⁸⁸
The cross is portrayed in its calculation;

286. Although the principal ms. reads "fifteenth," Beck has rightly altered his translation to correspond to the date of Passover.

287. Cf. Mark 9.2-8, esp. 5, et par. Cf. Virg. 20.2.2-3.

288. Here Ephrem uses the rabbinical exegetical device called *gematria*; cf. Nat. 27.2 and note ad loc. In ordinary usage each letter of the Hebrew or Syriac alphabet also represents a number. In one kind of *gematria* the numerical equivalents of each letter of a word are added together to achieve the numerical value of the word. Words which add up to the same value are assumed to be in mysterious relation to one another. Thus here when Ephrem compares the total for *'prym*, "Ephrem," (331) with the combined total for *slyb*, "Crucified" (133), and *zqyp*, "cross" (198), and finds them identical, he is satisfied that he has proved his point once more: There is a mysterious relation between the blessing of Ephrem and the crucifixion.

HYMN 21

the crucified too imprints His measurement,
the cross with the hands stretched out on it.
On "crucified" and "cross" his name depends.
How much I have wandered in you, child, that from all of you
crosses gaze at me.

- 9 You are the son of Asenath, the daughter of a pagan priest;²⁸⁹
she is a symbol of the church of the Gentiles.
She loved Joseph, and Joseph's son
in truth the holy church loved.
She had many children by the Crucified,
and on every member the cross is engraved.
By the symbol of Ephrem crosses are crowded into her,
by the birth from water.²⁹⁰

- 10 The cross is engraved on the chariot
to which are harnessed the living Cherubim.²⁹¹
Again, the cross is engraved on the human being
in the symbol even his structure stands.²⁹²
A third cross is also engraved
on the bird²⁹³ and on the earth and all that is on it.²⁹⁴
Three crosses encompass everything;
by you they are portrayed, O child.

- 11 Blessed are you on whose head
are symbolically placed three right hands.
Joseph offered you; Jacob marked you;
their right hands gave you the crown.
And the hidden heavenly right hand
wove a diadem for you in Samaria.²⁹⁵
Not everyone was able, child, [to understand]
the symbols portrayed in you.

289. Gen. 41.45, 50–52.

290. Ephrem's understanding of baptism is closely linked with the crucifixion; cf. Saber, *Théologie*, 51–55, 132–34.

291. Cf. Ezek. 1.4–25, and HdF 55.3.

292. Cf. HdF 18.12, also Just. I apol. 55.

293. Cf. HdF 18.2.

294. Cf. HdF 17.11, 24.8, also Just. apol. 60.

295. Beck suggests an allusion to Acts 8.12, but cf. also Virg. 19.2.

This first of two hymns on the Samaritan woman at the well is like the hymns that precede it in the collection in that Ephrem singles out for comment a Gentile from the New Testament, specifically from John's gospel, to argue her typological importance for his contemporaries. He begins with the assertion fundamental to Christian typological exegesis, that Jesus has fulfilled what Moses began; here the assertion is clothed in the language of farming and drawing water from a well (str. 1). This leads easily to the Samaritan woman who came to the well of Jacob seeking ordinary water and received instead the living water of Christ (str. 2). The promise that one who receives the living water will not thirst again is interpreted to mean that there is only one Messiah (str. 3).

At this point Ephrem launches into a surprising argument: It is not the case that this woman has been divorced and remarried five times and is therefore reproached by Jesus for immorality. Instead she is the victim of a plight like that of Sarah before her marriage to Tobias (str. 4–5). Because the deaths of five successive husbands made all fearful of marrying her and yet to be unmarried subjected her to reproach, she had devised a false marriage for the sake of appearances. Far from being virtually a harlot, as others assume, Ephrem argues that her secret revealed by Jesus is that she is living chastely in her marriage (str. 12–13). This is evident on three grounds: 1) the confidence of her manner of argument (str. 5–9); 2) Jesus' willingness to speak along with her (str. 5, 10–11); and 3) several typological precedents for her behavior for example, others, notably Elizabeth and Hannah were chagrined by their lack of husbands or children (str. 14–15); just as the unmasking of a deception by Abraham and Sarah about Sarah's marital status led to the respect of a Gentile king for God, the unveiling of this woman's deception led to the belief of a city of Gentiles (str. 16–18); just as Tamar disguised her marital status for the sake of continuing the messianic line, so the deception of the Samaritan woman led to the revelation of the Messiah to her people (str. 19–20). Finally, Ephrem asserts that the woman, led step by step in

HYMN 22

conversation with Jesus, “is a type of our humanity that he leads step by step” (str. 21).

22

On Samaria on the previous melody

- 1 Our Lord labored and He went like a farmer
to water the seed that Moses sowed.
Directly to the well He went to give
hidden and living water for the sake of the revelation.
Blessed is Moses, who, with the book he wrote, sowed
the symbols of the Messiah, still young;
by [Christ’s] watering were the seeds of the house of Moses
perfected,
and they were reaped by His disciples.

Refrain: Praises to your humility!

- 2 Blessed are you, drawer of ordinary water,
who turned out to be a drawer of living water.²⁹⁶
You found the treasure, another Source,
from Whom a flood of mercies flows.
The spring had dried up, but it broke through to you and gave you
to drink.²⁹⁷
He was poor, but He asked in order to enrich you.
You left behind your pitcher, but you filled understanding
and gave your people to drink.
- 3 Blessed are you to whom He gave living water to drink,
and you did not thirst again, as you said.
For he called the truth “living water,”
since all who hear it will not thirst again.²⁹⁸
Blessed are you who learned the truth and did not thirst;
for one is the Messiah and there are no more.

296. Cf. John 4.1–42. The pericope is similarly treated in Comm. Diat. 12.6.16–20.

297. John 4.28–30.

298. John 4.13–15.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Your husbands are many, your Messiahs are not many,
for one is the Only-begotten.²⁹⁹

- 4 Blessed are you, woman, because you saw
that your husbands were dead, and your reproaches were many.
Other men were afraid to take you [in marriage],
lest they, like their counterparts, die.³⁰⁰
You took a pretended and bribed husband
to set aside your reproach but not to approach your body.
The contract and the oaths that you made secretly
He revealed to you, and you believed in Him.³⁰¹
- 5 Blessed are you, who are slandered even by our people,
although by your people you were not reviled.
We have called you a harlot, but if you were,
your bad reputation would have wafted to Him.
Blessed is your perception that you disputed with your Lord.
Your dispute shows that your heart was not contemptible.
If you had been a harlot, your silence would have offered tears
to the one who gives life to all.³⁰²
- 6 For she answered and spoke as a learned one,
as a disputant, yet modestly,
"Our fathers worshipped on this mountain."³⁰³
Since the heads of [her] people [were] of the house of Abraham,
it was not necessary for her to petition about her sins,
for her love had been bound in the presence of righteous men.
Since He revealed to her one thing, she prodded Him to teach her
reality without contention
- 7 She answered again, saying perceptively,
"Lord, I see that you are a prophet."³⁰⁴
If, indeed, our Lord revealed her shame to her,
compassion in judgment would be righteous for her

299. Ephrem contrasts Christian belief with Samaritan messianic expectations. Possibly he alludes here specifically to the followers of a Samaritan messianic figure named Dositheus; cf. Or. c. Cels. 1.57, 6.11; further, H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge, 1965), 325, n. 1. Jerome takes the woman's five husbands to be the books of the Pentateuch and the sixth to be Dositheus, Hier. epis. 108 (v322 13.3)

300. Cf. Tob. 3.7-15, 6.10-8.9.

301. Cf. John 4.16-19.

302. Cf. Luke 7.36-50.

303. John 4.20a.

304. John 4.19.

HYMN 22

as for the sinful woman who sought forgiveness
with her head bowed and her mouth closed.
But she was modest yet her head was high
and her voice was authoritative.

- 8 She said, "I have no husband,"³⁰⁵ to tell Him the truth
and to test Him in two respects:

what she had and what she did not have—to see if He
would be able to arrive at her secrets.

Our Lord revealed the two of them and amazed her,
who both had and did not have a husband.

She was astonished and convinced; she was amazed and believed,
and she acknowledged [Him] and worshipped Him.

- 9 Obey, my tongue, put to rest your labor
and run in silence to meet your rest.

Who, indeed, calls to you to become, without pay,
the advocate of words for the reviled woman?

Not out of malice have you been slandered, O woman;
our Lord will forgive even those who slandered you.

Scripture will console you, and we, too, will comfort you
commensurate with our weakness.

- 10 Since our Lord did not allow at all
even one of His [disciples] to remain with Him,
if you were a harlot, would not this Holy One
have given cause for calumny?

Into the presence of the daughter of Jairus, who was dead,
He brought three of His disciples and entered.³⁰⁶

The entire city was persuaded of your respectability.
Glory to the One Who set you free.

- 11 . . .
who slandered . . .

. . . the body, since . . .

The scriptures blushed to explain to them
in what manner and how much unclean men have slandered.
He alone labored with you and sanctified you,
in order to be like His glorious Father,

305. John 4.17a.

306. Mark 5.21–43, esp. 5.37, et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- Who alone fashioned woman and sanctified her,
and led her to Adam.³⁰⁷
- 12 Therefore, since she concealed [her] secret
and she heard the saying about living water,
she tested with this sign, "If he reveals to me
the marriage contract that exists, then he is a god."
Our Lord revealed to her this secret of hers and gave her to drink,
and she thirsted not for worldly water.
She left the mortal man and did not seek his protection,
for the Living One espoused her.³⁰⁸
- 13 Rightly she said and our Lord confirmed
concerning that man, that he was not her husband.
Yet He revealed that he existed, and if he had been a wicked man,
[Jesus] would not have been able to conceal [this] utterly
since He was trusted by her.
Therefore she to whom He said, "He exists," witnesses
that he was either old or indigent and sat in her protection
as she in his shelter.
- 14 It is written, "Seven women will take
a single man" out of their shame,
but they seek nothing more than his name
"to make the reproach pass away" from their ears.³⁰⁹
For among Samaritans and Hebrews it is a curse
[to be] a widow or a barren or divorced woman.
[About] Elizabeth it is written that by means of her conception
the reproach of her barrenness passed away.³¹⁰
- 15 The rival wife of Hannah also with this
annoyed her about her barrenness.³¹¹
How harsh is the reproach of her, who [has buried]
tree and fruit, husband and children.

307. Beck sees an anti-Marcionite or anti-Manichaean polemic here.

308. Ephrem infers that the woman now openly embraces celibacy. If this understanding antedates Ephrem, and if Vööbus is correct in arguing that celibacy was required of the baptisand of the early Syriac Church, then this might be a dimension of the iconographic significance of the Samaritan woman's portrayal at the Dura baptistery; Vööbus, *Celibacy*. Cf. C. H. Kraeling, with C. B. Welles, *The Christian Building, Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report*, 8.2, (New Haven, 1967), 67-69, 186-88, 207, n. 5, 210-12, Pl. XL.

309. Isa. 4.1.

310. Luke 1.25.

311. 1 Sam. 1.1-2.11, esp. 1.6.

HYMN 22

- She was called an accursed vine,
 consumer of blossoms and destroyer of vinedressers,
 the earth that destroyed the seeds and the sowers.
 Glory to the One Who let her forget!³¹²
- 16 Let us read, for it is not hard for Abraham
 to convince [us] about the daughter of Abraham.
 Sarah and Abraham made a contract,
 a secret that no one knew:
 "Therefore, say of me that I am [your] brother."³¹³
 If Abraham and Sarah, the faithful ones,
 deceived when they were compelled, so also when compelled,
 she deceived the onlookers.
- 17 Just as when Sarah and Abraham affirmed
 in this symbol as if for our benefit,
 so also the daughter Abraham affirmed;
 she as well as he [did so] for our advantage.³¹⁴
 Although she had a husband, Sarah denied [it]
 but she made a husband for herself as a pretext.
 Come let us marvel at the diverse deceits
 of respectable women!
- 18 Just as God . . .
 revealed that Sarah was the wife of a husband,
 so also the Son of the Most High
 revealed that this woman was without husband.
 And just as by Sarah . . .
 the house of Abimelech believed because of her,
 so the Samaritans believed because of her
 who received the One Who restores life for all.
- 19 Tamar saw that her consorts were dead,
 and she sat down [as a prostitute at the gate] to great reproach.
 Judah feared that he would die and Shelah too.³¹⁵
 . . . type, the Samaritans feared.
 Tamar deceived and made her reproach pass away,

312. The Samaritan woman is once again the subject of the last lines of this strophe. The Syriac here should read *ld'nšy* rather than *ld'šy*.

313. Gen. 20.1–18, esp. 20.13; cf. Gen. 12.10–20, Gen. 26.6–11, and Nat. 20.4.

314. Ephrem puns on *'wdrn'*, "benefit," and *'ywtrn'*, "advantage," here and in str. 19.7–8.

315. Gen. 38.6–30, esp. 38.11; cf. Comm. Diat. 12.6.19.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

and the Samaritan woman concealed her reproach.
Tamar's deceit was revealed for our benefit,
and hers for our advantage.

- 20 Tamar trusted that from Judah
would arise the king whose symbol she stole.³¹⁶
This woman, too, among the Samaritans expected
that perhaps the Messiah would arise from her.
Tamar's hope was not extinguished,
nor was this woman's expectation in vain,
as from her, therefore, our Lord arose in this town,
for by her He was revealed there.
- 21 Because she in her desire said, "The Messiah will come,"
He revealed to her with love, "I am He."
That He was a prophet she believed already;
soon after, that He was the Messiah.
O Wise One, Who appeared as a thirsty man,
[and] soon was called a prophet,
[and next] she understood He is Messiah; she is a type of our
humanity
that He leads step by step.³¹⁷

316. Cf. Nat. 9.12.

317. Comm. Diat. 12.6.18.

23

Here Ephrem portrays the Samaritan woman primarily as an apostle. Ephrem praises her for her readiness to share her insight into Jesus' messianic identity (str. 1). Also laudable is the immediacy of her response to one small sign, to be contrasted with the obstinacy of those who refused to accept even the greater evidence of miracles (str. 2). Yet it is Christ himself who determines the flow of his living water appropriate to each human being (str. 3). In her revelation to others of what she had heard, she is like Mary who conceived by her ear and thereby brought the Son to the world (str. 4–5). Like the words of the prophets, what she spoke became reality (str. 6). Even before the Twelve were permitted to do so, she preached the good news of salvation to the Gentiles (str. 7). The final strophes introduce themes of Eve and Adam, Christ as the Bread of Life, Shechem and Joshua, but the fragmentary state of the text makes it impossible to determine their relation to the previous strophes.

23

The eleventh on the same melody

- 1 Blessed are you, O woman, for not suppressing
your judgment about what you discovered.
The glorious Treasury was Himself present
for your need because of His love.
Your love was zealous
to share your treasure with your city.
Blessed woman, your discovery became
the Discoverer of the lost.

*Refrain: Glory to the Discoverer of all!*³¹⁸

- 2 Blessed are you, O woman, for not wearying
your Hunter³¹⁹ as has the daughter of Sion.

³¹⁸. Or "Omnipotent One."

³¹⁹. Cf. Comm. Diat. 12.6.16.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- With that small sign He taught and caught you,
and, in turn, He showed His great wealth,
so that not [merely] by your word would there be faith in Him,
Who had shown signs that were mighty.
Small was the blessed sign for her
by comparison with miracles.
- 3 The glorious fount of Him who was sitting
at the well as Giver of drink to all,
flows to each according to His will:
Different springs according to those who drink.
From the well as single undifferentiated drink
came up each time for those who drank.
The Living Fount lets distinct blessings
flow to distinct people.³²⁰
- 4 O, to you, woman in whom I see
a wonder as great as in Mary!
For she from within her womb
in Bethlehem brought forth His body as a child,
but you by your mouth made Him manifest
as an adult in Shechem, the town of His father's household.
Blessed are you, woman, who brought forth by your mouth
light for those in darkness.
- 5 Mary, the thirsty land in Nazareth,
conceived our Lord by her ear.³²¹
You, too, O woman thirsting for water,
conceived the Son by your hearing.
Blessed are your ears that drank the source
that gave drink to the world.
Mary planted him in the manger,
but you [planted him] in the ears of His hearers.
- 6 Your word, O woman, became a mirror
in which He might see your hidden heart.³²²

320. Cf. *Virg.* 22.21.

321. Elsewhere Ephrem uses this imagery to elaborate a much broader parallel between Eve and Mary, cf. *Ecl.* 35.17, 49.7, cited by Beck, *Mariologie*, 33f. Graef notes the same idea in Zeno, cf. Graef, *Mary*, 56–59.

322. Ephrem frequently uses the image of the mirror as the transmitter of "knowledge, insight into otherwise hidden and invisible things;" cf. Beck, *Spiegel*, 5.

HYMN 23

"The Messiah," you had said, "will come,
and when He comes, He will give us everything."³²³
Behold the Messiah for Whom you waited, modest woman!
With your voice . . .

. . .

your prophecy was fulfilled.

- 7 Your voice, O woman, first brought forth fruit,
before even the apostles, with the *kerygma*.
The apostles were forbidden to announce Him
among pagans and Samaritans.³²⁴
Blessed is your mouth that He opened and confirmed.
The Storehouse of life took and gave you to sow.
Into a city that was as dead as Sheol
You entered and revived your dead [country].

- 8 Blessed are you, O woman, . . .

. . .

Eve . . . Adam

. . .

Cluster . . . blessing

. . . clusters . . .

As . . .

. . . all of them ran to swallow it.

- 9 Eve had become a vine of death;
the sprouts from her first brought forth pains.
By desire she plucked the fruit that also
was first-ripe . . .

. . .

. . . was desirable

. . .

He ate . . .

- 10 Blessed are you, O Shechem, into which the hungry entered
to buy bread for the Sustainer of all.³²⁵
But you entered and gave the Living Bread,
the Truth who freely disclosed Himself.

323. Cf. John 4.25.

324. Matt. 10.5.

325. John 4.8.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Blessed are your fields that in the parable were whitened
and attained the blessed harvest.³²⁶

Ears of grain are not ripened, [but] souls were perfected;
they became zealous, were whitened and resembled you.

11 Blessed are you, O Shechem, beloved of righteous men.
Treasure . . . and treasury of symbols

. . .

[Joshua] made laws and judgments on Shechem;
in you Jesus is also named.³²⁷

This . . . the wood of our Savior.

Indeed how many blessings and symbols you recall!

Blessed is He who magnified you, our native land!³²⁸

326. John 4.35.

327. Cf. Josh. 24.1–28; and Virg. 17.3.

328. In calling Samaria “our native land” Ephrem not only alludes to the land of the patriarch whose name he bears, Ephrem the son of Joseph, but he also confirms his identification of the Samaritans and Canaanites with the Gentile church, cf. Virg. 17–23. A postscript reads, “The two hymns on the Samaritan woman are completed.”

This hymn returns to the theme of the first three of the collection: virginity, theologically understood. Ephrem contrasts the freedom, peace and happiness of the virginal state with the transitory joys of marriage (esp. str. 1, 8, 11, 12). The pangs of childbirth, the transitoriness of youthful beauty, and the shortcomings of human bridegrooms are specifically invoked (str. 5, 11, 12, 13). Several distinctive images are interwoven to illustrate the meaning of virginity. The virgin is a tree, her womb a nest in which the sparrow of chastity makes its home (str. 1, 3). The virgin as a tree easily passes over into the image of a shoot grafted onto the Tree of Life (str. 4). Yet she is also bride and temple and castle (str. 8, 10, 11). She contemplates the lasting beauty of God, as did Mary Magdalen and the prophetess Anna (str. 7, 10). A complex array of bird imagery is linked to the trees as well as to the heavenly heights: Chastity, the bird who builds her nest high above the earth to protect her young, the virgins, from the serpent, Satan, is able to soar like the eagle upward to the heavenly bridal couch (str. 3). The virgin, or virginity or chastity—all grammatically feminine—is a dove that alights on the olive tree, symbol of Christ (str. 9).

24

On virginity, to the same melody

- 1 Blessed are you, virgin, with whom
the comely name of virginity grows old.
In your branches chastity³²⁹ built a nest;
may your womb be a nest for her dwelling place.
May the power of mercy preserve your temple.³³⁰

329. "Holiness," *qdyšwt'*, acquires the meaning of "chastity" in early Syriac literature. For chastity as ■ bird, cf. *Virg.* 1.6 and 2.1.

330. From Greek *ναός*.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

May the voice of the Mighty One restrain your enemy
that you may be a good incentive for onlookers
forever and ever.

Refrain: . . .

2 Blessed are you . . . pearl

. . .

3 Blessed are you, heavenly sparrow
whose nest was on the cross of light.³³¹
You did not want to build a nest on earth
lest the serpent enter and destroy your offspring.³³²
Blessed are your wings that were able to fly.
May you come with the holy eagles³³³
that took flight and soared from the earth below
to the bridal couch of delights.³³⁴

4 Blessed are you, O shoot that Truth cultivated;
He engrafted your medicine into the Tree of Life.
Your fruit exults and rejoices at all times
to drink the drink of the Book of Life.
Blessed are your branches . . .

. . .

. . . and was spoken . . .

. . .

5 Blessed are you, O bride, espoused to the Living One,
You who do not long for a mortal man.
Foolish is the bride who is proud
of the ephemeral crown that will be gone tomorrow.
Blessed is your heart, captivated by the love
of a beauty portrayed in your mind.³³⁵
You have exchanged the transitory bridal couch for the bridal couch
whose blessings are unceasing.

331. The cross of light is a symbol of paradise, cf. CNis 69.21 and HdF 18.11.2.

332. Cf. Virg. 2.3.

333. Cf. Azym. 17.11.

334. Ephrem's use of heavenly bridal imagery is reminiscent of the song of Judas Thomas in the *Acts of Thomas* 6–7.

335. Like the image of the mirror, the image of a painting or drawing is frequently used by Ephrem to speak of hidden things made apparent to the mind; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 244–49, and idem. *Spiegel*, 5–8.

HYMN 24

- 6 Blessed are you, O ewe lamb who offered yourself,
 . . .
- 7 Blessed are you if you will be a daughter to Mary³³⁶
 whose eye scorned all persons.
 She turned her face away from everything
 to gaze on one beauty alone.
 Blessed is her love that was intoxicated, not sober,³³⁷
 so that she sat at His feet to gaze at Him.
 Let you also portray the Messiah in your heart³³⁸
 and love Him in your mind.
- 8 Blessed are you, peaceful woman, who as if on high
 stood and considered humankind.
 You saw the world, weary and distressed
 and utterly burdened with a wearisome yoke.
 Blessed is your beauty—free and not laboring at
 the unending service of [your] Betrothed.
 You chose the Bridegroom Whose splendor would adorn you
 and Whose dew would refresh you.³³⁹
- 9 Blessed too is that dove³⁴⁰ who scorned
 splendid cedars³⁴¹ and cypresses.
 She took shelter³⁴² in the love of the blessed Olive Tree³⁴³
 that was the King's Son, your Betrothed.
 . . .
- 10 Blessed also is that Anna who hated
 her house and loved the Temple of her Lord.³⁴⁴
 She gazed intently at hidden beauty
 for eighty years but was not sated.
 Blessed is her gaze that she concentrated on the One.

336. Luke 10. 38–42.

337. Contemplation was described as “sober inebriation” in a variety of philosophical and religious texts of Late Antiquity, cf. Lewy, *Sobria ebrietas*.

338. Again, the language of portraiture is invoked, cf. Virg. 2.15 and 24.5.

339. The Syriac includes word play not easily reproduced in English: *dbdrb mhdr lky / wtlb mtl' lky* = Whose splendor would adorn you/ and Whose dew would refresh you.

340. Cf. Virg. 2.8.

341. With a different vocalization *'arzê*, “cedars,” would become *'râzê*, “mysteries, symbols.”

342. Again, a different vocalization makes *tpas*, “take shelter,” into *tapas*, the denominative verb from *twps*, “type.”

343. Cf. Virg. 4–7.

344. Luke 2.36f.; Ephrem's calculation of Anna's eighty years in the Temple does not correspond to the scriptural account. “Temple” here is *bykl'*.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- Put to shame by her are inattentive, foolish women.
 But, noble woman, be modest and preserve your beauty
 from all for the Lord of all.
- 11 Blessed are you, O castle, castle of the King,³⁴⁵
 whose gate is greater than mortal beings.
 The glorious King dwelt within you.
 Let His love be a bulwark for your beauty.
 Your womb escaped from the pangs of the curse.
 By the serpent the pains of the female entered.³⁴⁶
 Let the defiled one³⁴⁷ be put to shame, seeing that
 his pangs were not in your womb.
- 12 Blessed are you who have abstained,
 for merry is the beginning, morose the end of this life.
 It begins joyfully as an adventure;
 it ends mournfully as a deception.
 Blessed is your heart that hated the world
 that, while beginning, has passed away and ceased to exist.
 Beauty blossoms for the foolish woman and makes her proud,
 but it fades and makes her downcast.
- 13 Blessed are you, free woman, who sold yourself
 to the Lord Who became a servant for your sake.
 A free woman serves a husband who wanders
 and wrongs her love. . . .
 Blessed . . .
 . . .³⁴⁸

345. Mary, mother of Jesus, may be meant here. "Castle" is *byrr*'.

346. Gen. 3.16. If Mary is addressed here, Ephrem alludes to the notion of her painless childbirth in the following lines; cf. Od. Sol. 19.6-10, and Prot. 18-19.

347. Satan, cf. HdP 12.11.

348. The fourteenth strophe is too fragmentary to translate.

Although the manuscript identifies the subject of this hymn as “the very blessed disciple,” it has as its broader concern the presence of Christ in all his followers. John, identified with the “beloved disciple” of the fourth gospel, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are types through whom we are able to see Christ as in a mirror while they themselves saw him in one another (str. 9). After a brief plea to share in the love of Christ for the beauty of the beloved disciple (str. 1), Ephrem turns to the Johannine account of the crucifixion, where Jesus invites Mary and John to regard one another as mother and son. The love and care that flowed from Mary to her Son are echoed by the love of Jesus for John and repaid by entrusting her to his care (str. 2–3). John shows a special resemblance to Jesus, Ephrem assumes, because he takes Jesus’ place as Mary’s son. But a deeper ethical mystery is contained here: The love of John for his Lord led him to imitate him, thus bringing into higher relief the *imago dei* engraved on each human being (str. 4). Through John’s resemblance to his Lord, Christ remains present to his mother, and similarly he makes himself present to all who seek him (str. 5–6).

The images of earthly rulers, in contrast to the rulers themselves, are without speech or reason. The situation is reversed for God and God’s human images: The Divine Being is beyond speech and rational analysis, but humans speak; they are God’s harps (str. 7). Scriptural examples, then, give us access to the inscrutable mysteries of God. Just as in one another Mary and John see the complementary mysteries of God’s condescending love for us and the bold access to divine love now open to human beings, so also, through them, we may see this twofold mystery of our Savior (str. 8–9). Just as John and Joseph recognized that Mary was the temple and tabernacle in which God dwelt, we should recognize Christian virgins, betrothed to Christ, as his temples, symbols of the mystery of the incarnation (str. 10–11). The incarnation is an unfathomable mystery (str. 11–12): When Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law and when as an infant he was presented to the prophetess, Anna, He was in reality the Creator of the world and the Source of prophecy (str. 13–16). King

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Solomon with his thousand wives is a type of Christ, Who is spiritually betrothed to many thousands of virgins, the first of whom is Anna (str. 16–18).

25

- On the very blessed disciple, thirteenth on the same melody
- 1 Gracious One, Who condescended to give Himself
even to the odious that they might be adorned by Him,
make me also worthy to be adorned
by the handsome beauty of Your disciple.
In this one You loved³⁴⁹ let me take refuge to find mercy.
Let me praise the one You cherished that I may be pleasing.
Let me therefore sing his love that You might reward me
with mercy rather than [just] wages.

Refrain: Glory to the Omnipotent One!

- 2 Blessed are you, O woman, whose Lord and son
entrusted³⁵⁰ you to one fashioned in His image.
The Son of your womb did not wrong your love,
but to the son of His bosom³⁵¹ He entrusted you.
Upon your bosom you caressed Him when He was small,
and upon His bosom He also caressed him,
so that when he was crucified He repaid all you had advanced to
Him,
the debt of His upbringing.
- 3 For, the Crucified repaid debts;³⁵²
even yours was repaid by Him.³⁵³

349. John 13.23, 19.26, 20.2, 21.7, 21.20.

350. The Syriac redundantly adds "and gave." Cf. John 19.26.

351. "Womb" in the previous line and "bosom" here are both 'wb', in contrast to hdy' in the next two lines. Cf. John 13.23, 21.20.

352. Cf. Col. 2.13–14.

353. Although the scriptural reference suggests that Mary's debt to God as a member of sinful humanity is meant, the last lines of the previous strophe indicate that the human debt of Jesus to his mother is meant.

HYMN 25

He drank from your breast³⁵⁴ visible milk,
but he [drank] from His bosom hidden mysteries.³⁵⁵
Confidently He approached your breast;
confidently he approached and lay upon His bosom.
Since you missed the sound of His voice, He gave you his harp
to be a consolation to you.

- 4 The youth who loved our Lord very much,
who portrayed [and] put Him on and resembled Him,
was zealous in all these matters to resemble Him:
in his speech, his aspect and his ways.
The creature put on his Creator,
and he resembled Him although indeed he did not resemble what
He was.

It is amazing how much the clay is able to be imprinted
with the beauty of its sculptor.³⁵⁶

- 5 He left you yet did not leave you, since in His disciple
He returned and came to dwell with you.
Gracious is He who undertook sending Himself
to those far away although He was there.
His will descends to everyone;
He sends His love to every region.
Although He is hidden from all, to everyone who seeks Him
He is entirely present.³⁵⁷
- 6 Since He saw that you could not wean your love
from that infant whom you weaned,
He imprinted Himself, and the pure one represented the Innocent
One
that in His disciple you might see

. . .

. . . that it is fitting the image is portrayed.

354. The Syriac is *tdky*.

355. That Judas was to be the betrayer, cf. John 13.21–30, cf. Azym. 14.11, Cruc. 3.15, as noted by Beck, but surely more is meant.

356. Virg. 2.15.

357. It is not clear whether the presence of Christ is mediated only through other human beings, like John, who resemble him, or whether it may be attained through ■ more general presence of God in the world, as this line seems to imply.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- An articulate one stood for the Silent One
Who was judged and did not speak.³⁵⁸
- 7 All the images of kings are silenced
although their lords are very articulate.
The images of our Savior are a wonder
since their wills are their harps.³⁵⁹
The Word of that glorious Silence is
He whose manner of being cannot be spoken.³⁶⁰
The creature utters a sound, rather than the Father and the Son
Who dwell in one another and are Silent.³⁶¹
- 8 The youth in the woman was seeing
how much that Exalted One was lowered,
how He entered [and] dwelt in a weak womb
and emerged [and] was suckled with weak milk.³⁶²
The woman also wondered at how much He grew
that He went up and lay upon the bosom of God.
The two of them were amazed at one another, how much they were
able
to grow by grace.
- 9 You, Lord, Whom they saw in . . .
while observing one another:
Your mother saw You in Your disciple;
And he saw You in Your mother.
Oh, the seers who at every moment
see You, Lord, in a mirror³⁶³
manifest ■ type so that we, too, in one another
may see You, our Savior.
- 10 With awe and tenderness the youth honored
the Temple in which You dwelt, to teach us
that today the King's Son dwells

358. Mark 14.61 et par.

359. For the free will as virtually the *imago dei*, cf. Beck, Reden, 64–74, esp. 65, n.2; but for other aspects of the *imago dei*, cf. Kronholm, Motifs, 45–51.

360. In Syriac as in Greek, reason and speech are synonymous, as are rationality and the capacity to speak; the capacity to speak of the God's manner of being would imply the capacity to comprehend the divine essence.

361. HdF 11.6.

362. Nat. 4.146–213, Nat. 5.19–24.

363. Those who see Christ are like mirrors, reflecting his image to others; cf. Beck, Spiegel, and idem, Bildtheologie, 268–73.

HYMN 25

in holy virgins.³⁶⁴

The discerning person who perceives she is a temple
is terrified of dishonoring Your betrothed.

Oh, how grievous to dare
to dishonor the King in His Temple!

- 11 Joseph and also John honored
Your mother's womb as a symbol.³⁶⁵

It is the symbol of the Tabernacle, the temporal Tabernacle,
in which Emmanuel was dwelling.³⁶⁶

Both of them persist in admonishing us
not to belittle God in His temples.

A dispute! How frightful that by our investigation
we should measure that immeasurable Height!³⁶⁷

- 12 A depth unable to be fathomed by inquirers!

A height too high for mortals!

A length unable to be gauged in cubits!

A breadth not measurable in handspans!

If you had the wings of seraphim,
you would by no means be able to measure
the Infant in his crib—contemptible in His appearance
but great in His secret reality.

- 13 Blessed are you, sick mother-in-law of Simon,
whom the Physician on high came down to visit.³⁶⁸

Although He approached, it was not to touch your hand,³⁶⁹
for He is the One Who stretched out all the veins.

He buried the fever in them.

The source of perspiration partook of their³⁷⁰ fire.

By the glance of their Lord the two of them
both conquered and were conquered in the one body.

- 14 In your sick body dwelt a fever,

364. Cf. Nat. 17.5–6. Christ is also present in male virgins, CNis 46.1, cf. Beck, *Mariologie*, 37.

365. Cf. Nat. 16.16.

366. For Mary as the Ark of the covenant, cf. Nat. 4.113, and 16.16.

367. As Beck notes, this is an anti-Arian polemic; cf. HdF 4.17.

368. Mark 1.29–31 et par.

369. Mark 1.30 and Matt. 8.15, but cf. Luke 4.39, where Jesus does not touch her hand.

370. I.e., the veins' fire. Perspiration was seen as a cure for fever, as Beck notes, cf. Epiph.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

hidden, invisible fire.

In your Physician's body [dwelt] the fire of the height,³⁷¹
visible only to spiritual beings.

This is a wonder, and who is able to speak of it?—
that the fervor of mercy entered, cooled and healed you.
The listeners were amazed at the perfection that allayed
the intensity of her fever.

- 15 Blessed are you, fair old Anna,
whom the silent Infant made a prophetess,³⁷²
for His hidden silence roared in your mind
so that in you He might sing of His exploits.
In you He interpreted His deeds as a child,
but He will complete them Himself as an adult—
the Infant Who, although silent, sang in every tongue,
Who is the Lord of all mouths.

- 16 Blessed are you, old woman, treasure of perception,³⁷³
whom this ancient Babe met.
You, therefore, old woman, he espoused first of all,
the Babe Who came to espouse souls.³⁷⁴
He made you the first of all of them,
and by your old age he put childishness in its proper place.
He polished a mirror [and] set it up for children
to learn modesty.

- 17 King Solomon took fully a thousand
wives—a very licentious thing!³⁷⁵
Our glorious Lord made disciples of myriads of myriads
Of virgins—a powerful, splendid thing!
In this son of David was seen a singular thing,
But in You, Son of David, took place a miraculous thing!
O, Son of Isaiah, from whose seed two sons³⁷⁶

. . .

371. Christ as a fiery coal, cf. Nat. 6.13. 9.15, 11.5 and HdF 10.10.

372. Luke 2.36–38; cf. Nat. 6.13–14.

373. Cf. Virg. 22.5.

374. For Christ as the Bridegroom of souls, cf. CH 17.5.

375. 1 Kgs. 11.3.

376. For Isaiah's two sons and their symbolic names, cf. Isa. 7.3–4 and 8.1–4; a lacuna in the manuscript leaves Ephrem's thought incomplete.

HYMN 25

- 18 Solomon was unruly as to his will,³⁷⁷
a fruit of the earth as to his root.
The will of the unsullied Child is pure,
and His nature is as pure as His Begetter.³⁷⁸
The flock of the pure Lamb is also chaste,
The herd of the licentious one is unruly.
The daughters of Tyre led him astray,³⁷⁹ but, as it is written,
a daughter of Tyre worshipped You.³⁸⁰

377. On the importance of the will, cf. Nat. 1.98, Virg. 20.5, 25.7 and notes ad loc.

378. Ephrem does not distinguish the divine from the human will in Christ. This in conjunction with his bold kenotic imagery made his hymns especially open to the interpretation of later so-called Monophysite thinkers such as Philoxenus, cf. Beck, Reden, 89–91.

379. 1 Kgs. 11.1–8, esp. 11.1, where only Sidon is mentioned, not Tyre.

380. Mark 7.25–26. A postscript reads, “Completed is one hymn on the disciple whose blessedness was great.”

Resuming the theme of spiritual marriage to Christ that ends the previous hymn, Ephrem looks at a series of women in the New Testament whom he characterizes as spiritual brides of Christ. From him as Creator and Lord they had received all; out of his gift each of them gave to him as a human being (str. 16.5–6). This relationship is symbolic of marital intimacy (str. 16). In addition each woman teaches a particular lesson. In Mary, mother of Jesus, are portrayed “the childlike daughters of the innocent Eve,” the Christian virgins (str. 1). Martha, Mary and Lazarus, respectively, are remembered for having fed Jesus, having received his teaching and having been restored to life by him (str. 2). But Martha herself is praised for her outspokenness as well as for her service (str. 3). The anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman, perhaps to be identified here with Mary, sister of Martha, is placed in a line with priestly and royal messiahship, as well as being a model of forgiveness (str. 4). The woman who cried out to Jesus, “Blessed is the womb that bore you” is the means for encouraging all to pursue God’s blessing (str. 5). The healing of the woman with the hemorrhage is a model of the healing of hidden anger (str. 6). The parable of the widow’s mite warns us against greed disguised as prudence (str. 7–8). The Syro-Phoenician woman represents the faith of the Gentiles (str. 9). The widow whose son was resurrected without her request reminds us that the Son saved the creation by his free act, not in response to our entreaties (str. 10). The girl raised by Jesus is a model of simplicity (str. 11). The mother of James and John is praised for her foresight in anticipating the role of Jesus as judge (str. 12–13). Finally, the wife of Pilate, who judged Jesus, is another model of Gentile faith (str. 14–15).

Clearly Ephrem has sought out women from the New Testament as models for Christian behavior. Surprisingly, in cases where the gospel account seems to imply a reproach from Jesus to the woman, Ephrem seems unaware or ignores this feature (str. 3, 5, 9, 12–13). Further, several times he praises the woman for her boldness in speaking, even in the case

HYMN 26

of the Syro-Phoenician woman, whom he perceives as correcting Jesus' overly narrow view of salvation only for the Jews (str. 2, 9, 12-13).

26

Fourteenth on the same melody

- 1 The Gracious One Who coaxed me to speak the blessings
that His mouth announced . . .
. . . opened [my] mouth
not to investigate but to confess
that One Who sprang forth from Mary to portray by her
the childlike daughters of Eve, the innocent Eve.³⁸¹
I shall sing for Your advent the blessings of chaste women
that I may be worthy of association with You.

Refrain: To You be praises from all!

- 2 Blessed are you, Martha, who without fear
served the One feared by all.³⁸²
You nourished the Storehouse Who freely gives
living bread to humankind,
Blessed is your sister whom He made tranquil and taught,³⁸³
and your brother who was strengthened and revived.³⁸⁴
By you³⁸⁵ He stirred up the divided, the disunited,
to be united in one love.
- 3 Blessed are you, Martha, to whom love gave
the confidence that opened your mouth.³⁸⁶
By the fruit Eve's mouth was closed
while she was hidden among the trees.³⁸⁷
Blessed is your mouth that sounded forth with love

381. Mary is so strongly portrayed as the second Eve that she is simply called "the innocent Eve." Cf. Beck, *Mariologie*, passim.

382. Luke 10.38-42.

383. Luke 10.39.

384. John 11.1-44.

385. Martha, Mary and John. The Syriac is plural.

386. Luke 10.40.

387. Gen. 3.8.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- at the table at which God reclined.
You are greater than Sarah who served the servants,³⁸⁸
for you [served] the Lord of all.
- 4 Blessed are you, woman, most enviable of women,
who kissed the holy feet!³⁸⁹
Your hands anointed the holy Anointed
Whose horn priests and kings had anointed.
Blessed are your sufferings that were healed by the Word
and your sins that were forgiven by a kiss.³⁹⁰
He taught His church to kiss in purity
[His] all-sanctifying body.³⁹¹
- 5 Blessed are you, woman, whose voice became
a trumpet . . . among the silent.
A blessing you gave to the pure womb
that carried the Lord of blessings.³⁹²
Blessed are you to whom as the representative of others
He handed over the blessing He gave you in conversation.³⁹³
The blessing that He gave you He made a part of the whole
so that all would pursue it.
- 6 Blessed are you, woman! The flow of mercy
met you and healed the flow of your blood.³⁹⁴
That Sun Who dispelled from souls
the frost of the hidden death—
its hidden flash radiated and dried up
every fresh anger the mind perceives.³⁹⁵
With the tip of your finger, you tasted the healing of the springs
of the Sea of benefits.
- 7 Blessed are you, woman, living in poverty,
who put two treasures on High.³⁹⁶

388. Gen. 18.6.

389. Luke 7.38, 45; the parallel versions all lack this detail.

390. Luke 7.45–48. Although the anointing is in all four gospels, only Luke identifies the woman as a sinner and includes this detail.

391. This might refer to sacramental practice.

392. Luke 11.27.

393. Luke 11.28.

394. Mark 5.25–34 et par.

395. The flow of blood represents hidden anger.

396. Mark 12.41–44; cf. Luke 21.1–4.

HYMN 26

It is a wonder on which Greatness gazed.
His eye reached out to the contemptible thing.
The two obols were weighed and they surpassed
a talent on God's scale.

Her life depended on the obols she lent,³⁹⁷
and, impoverished, she stood [there].

- 8 Who is not reproved by greed?
And in whom is not hidden a foul manner of life?
Who has not stored up and set [aside] too much,
so that it reproaches him that he has not been purified?
Let one who resembles you, O widow, praise you,
for my mind is too poor³⁹⁸ to gaze at you.
By your poverty is convicted and exposed
the provision of our greed.

- 9 You, too, daughter of Canaan, for righteousness
conquered the Unconquerable One by boldness.³⁹⁹
The Just One set a boundary on the land of the Gentiles
that the gospel might not cross over.⁴⁰⁰
Blessed are you who broke through the obstacle fearlessly.
The Lord⁴⁰¹ of boundaries praised you for the strength
of your faith.⁴⁰² From afar He healed
your daughter in your house⁴⁰³

- 10 Blessed are you, too, O widow,
for the world was dead, and your son was dead.⁴⁰⁴
But your son revived without entreaty,
and without prayer the creation was saved.
Your wailing did not summon the Physician,
nor did our prayer make our Savior bend down.

397. As Beck has suggested, she "lent" them since she put them "on High"; cf. Virg. 26.7.2, just above.

398. Here Ephrem puns on "reproved," *bsyr* (in the first line of the strophe), and "poor," *byr*.

399. Matt. 15.21–28, cf. Mark 7.24–30. Ephrem also praises the woman at the well of Shechem for her boldness, cf. Virg. 22.5–9.

400. Matt. 10.5f.

401. Beck's Syriac text has plural here, apparently a misprint.

402. Matt. 15.28.

403. Mark 7.30.

404. Luke 7.11–17.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Mercy made Him condescend—the One Who came down and gave
life

to the world and to the youth.⁴⁰⁵

- 11 Blessed are you, too, young girl,⁴⁰⁶

[you] who are like a mirror of simplicity.

He brought you to life and nourished you,⁴⁰⁷
for childhood is in need of learning.

The girl who was dead is a symbol of the innocent flock.

Our Lord brought to life from the dead [Jewish] people
a sleeping corpse as a symbol of the youthful soul.

He summoned them and she was revived.⁴⁰⁸

- 12 Blessed are you, woman, who, seeing
the Son seated, did not hesitate.

Doubtless His seat was contemptible and insignificant,
but you were not confused as the daughter of a woman.⁴⁰⁹

Blessed are you who saw in your understanding the glorious
judgment seat

and you saw places for your beloved [sons].⁴¹⁰

Like you are the mothers who join
their sons to our Savior.

- 13 Blessed are you, woman, who while our Lord
was on earth, saw Him on high.

Your love was exalted and broke through heaven
and saw the Son on the right hand.

Blessed is your gaze! How great its range
that it measured that immeasurable mountain.

From within His smallness your faith
saw His greatness.

- 14 That woman also, wife of the just man
who sat in judgment of the Judge of all—

405. Ephrem puns on *'lm'*, "world," and *'lym'*, "youth."

406. Mark 5.21–43 et par.

407. Luke 8.55. The other accounts lack this detail.

408. The verb must be read as 3 sg. fem. with one ms., since the girl, her corpse and her soul are all grammatically feminine.

409. I.e., as a human being; the expression is the feminine counterpart to the more common and supposedly generic "son of man."

410. Matt. 20.20–28; cf. Mark 10.35–45, where James and John make their own request.

HYMN 26

dreams tormented her, visions upset her.⁴¹¹

A beckoning Watcher⁴¹² in her dream took pity on her;
he found faith in her and increased it.

To the shame of the [Jewish] people the daughter of Gentiles
shouted out.

Jerusalem cried out against the Good One, "Let Him be
crucified!"⁴¹³

But she [cried out], "Let Him be spared!"⁴¹⁴

15 A wonder are you, woman, and also your spouse,
who washed his hands upon his judgment seat.⁴¹⁵

Waves . . . of a pure dream

purified and cleansed you, too, in sleep.

The Gentiles were gleaming and purified and cleansed,
but the [Jewish] people were blackened and defiled by that
blood . . . the lamb put on light,
but the kid [put on] darkness.

16 Blessed, then, are all of you, O chaste women,
the church that was joined [in marriage] to the Son.⁴¹⁶

It is a wonder how much the Holy One condescended
so that women might be joined [in marriage] with honor.

They received from His bounty, and they gave to Him and
nourished Him.⁴¹⁷

From His gift they reached out to Him and satisfied Him.

He gave us a refined symbol in His intimacy.

Glory to His purity!⁴¹⁸

411. Matt. 27.19.

412. An angel; cf. Nat. 1.61, 4.199.

413. Matt. 27.22f.; cf. Mark 15.13f., et par.

414. Cf. Matt. 27.19.

415. Acts of Pilate 4.

416. Ephrem puns on *nkpt*, "chaste women," and *nqyp*, "joined."

417. For a similar idea relative to Mary's care of Jesus in the womb and as an infant, cf. Nat. 4.182-86.

418. A postscript reads, "Completed is the one hymn about the women disciples, those who were joined (in marriage) to our Lord."

Just as the twenty-fifth hymn of this collection ended by contrasting the “sons of David,” Solomon and Jesus as bridegrooms, this hymn begins by contrasting these two as musicians. Whereas Solomon’s music is associated with false worship, Jesus’ music brings joy to the entire creation (str. 1–2). In the fourth strophe Ephrem introduces the central theme of this hymn and of the three which follow: The music of Christ is played on three harps—the Old and New Testaments and nature (str. 4.4–6). Whereas Jews, heretics and pagans play only one harp or choose inappropriate musical instruments, the church plays the three harps of Christ (str. 3–4). Just as Christian baptism in three names is a touchstone of orthodoxy, so is the playing of the three harps, meaning a theology that teaches ■ God who is at once the God of the Jewish scripture, Father of Jesus Christ and Creator of the universe (str. 4). Ephrem identifies himself as one who qualifies both with respect to his baptism and his playing of the three harps (str. 5). At the end of time three groups will praise God with music: the resurrected, the elect who have not died, and the angels. Evil will be silenced (str. 6).

27

Fifteenth on the same melody

- 1 Solomon in his wisdom made harps
by which the Queen of Sheba was amazed.⁴¹⁹
She heard that he had been led into sin, and she scoffed;⁴²⁰
he delighted the demons with his songs.⁴²¹

419. Cf. 1 Kgs 10.12f.; cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV, 143–49, 152, 300.

420. According to the biblical account Solomon was led into sin by his wives, cf. 1 Kgs. 11.1–8, but Ephrem may mean by the music of the pagan cults. Cf. HdF 83.6, where he says that Solomon became a pagan.

421. Cf. 1 Sam. 16.14–23, where, by contrast, David’s playing drives away the demons.

HYMN 27

The faithful son of David Himself came,
and He made glorious harps.
The creation listened, heard and was overjoyed
by the sound of His promises.

Refrain: Blessed is the One Who makes all wise.

2 Solomon sinned . . .

Our Lord condescended to the foolish one,
the soul intoxicated with idolatry.⁴²²
The demon made it drunk with his song,
with trumpet and flute and cymbal.⁴²³
The Son of David came . . .

. . .

3 [The Jews and others played]⁴²⁴

on harps in various ways.
The circumcised chose for themselves the harp of Moses,
and the others each [chose] his harp.
The unclean stole⁴²⁵ and took numerous stringed [instruments].
Droning they took to be equal to song.
As bees in their hives they droned
as a symbol of blasphemy.⁴²⁶

4 Blessed are you, O church, whose congregation
sings with three glorious harps.

Your finger plucks the harp of Moses
and [the harp] of our Savior and [the harp] of nature.
Your faith plays the three [harps],
for three names baptized you.
You were not able to be baptized in one name nor
to play on one harp.

5 I, who have believed that they are as one
and also from One and by means of One,

422. Since the soul is grammatically feminine, Ephrem continues to play on the bridal imagery of Virg. 25.17–18 and Virg. 26.

423. An allusion to pagan cult as per Beck, Virg. 13.8, CJ 1.16.

424. The text is absent, but the following lines make this the probable sense of the missing line, as per Beck.

425. The Syriac adds "and took."

426. Beck has noted similar expressions in polemics against Mani, Marcion and Bardaisan in CH 1.11, 1.17 and 52.3.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

I have honored Moses, I have worshipped the Son
and I have professed that nature is pure.⁴²⁷
You have baptized me in the faithful names,
and you have handed me the glorious harps.
By them I have been made worthy of your coming, O Bridegroom,
You Who have been revealed . . .

- 6 The dead who came out of their graves⁴²⁸
will sing glory on their kitharas.
The living who fly up in their chariots⁴²⁹
will sing glory with their harps.
The watchers will blow their horns.
The evil ones will inherit a shutting of the mouth.
Since I have no [more] voice, sing in me that I may sing for you.
Glory to your advent.⁴³⁰

427. Against Mani and Marcion, as per Beck, CH 28.7 and 10, CH 45.9.

428. 1 Thess. 4.16.

429. 1 Thess. 4.17, where the living fly up in or with the clouds; for the clouds as chariots, cf. HdP 1.7 as per Beck.

430. A postscript adds, "Completed is the one hymn on the Queen of Sheba and on Solomon."

This is the first of three hymns developing the theme introduced in the previous hymn: the three harps of God. Here more fully than anywhere else, Ephrem has elaborated the essential features of his symbolic theology.⁴³¹ This first hymn is addressed to Christ, who is portrayed first as the musician sounding the varied strings of the three harps (str. 1). But the imagery shifts quickly to the visual arts and especially to imperial portraiture. The symbols of the Torah, the prototypes of the gospels, and the powers and signs of nature are like pigments mixed by Christ, the Painter, to portray not only himself but also his Father (str. 2). The types and prophecies of the Old Testament are like preliminary drawings, which are covered over by the paints (str. 3–4). He is the Light illuminating the shadows (str. 5). Like the king entering a distant region of his realm, his images pale beside his actual presence; yet, in contrast to his enemies, the faithful subjects of the king would never destroy those images (str. 6, 10). Even when a new image of the king is sculpted to replace the obsolete images made in earlier years, the old image is not destroyed (str. 10.4–8). These are lessons for the Jews and for the Marcionites. Because the former misunderstood and abused the kingship, they no longer have a king (str. 7–9). The latter mistakenly view the images of the king as rivals for the king and thus want to destroy his images when they realize they are inferior to the king himself or obsolete (str. 5–6, 10–12). The church recognizes the differences between the unchanging name and nature of God, on the one hand, and the names of the divine virtues and the transformations undergone for the sake of love in the incarnation, on the other hand (str. 11, 13).

431. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 256; for analysis of these three hymns, cf. *ibid.* 248–54.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

28

The sixteenth on the same melody

- 1 Who has ever sung the wonder and the miracle
and sounded altogether myriads of strings,
and mixed into wisdom the old
and new with the natural?⁴³²

The image of the Creator was hidden in them;
upon them openly You portrayed Him.

From all of them⁴³³ appeared the Lord of all
and the Son of the Lord of all.

Refrain: Glory to Your hiddenness!

- 2 The scattered symbols You have gathered
from the Torah toward Your beauty,
and You set forth the prototypes in Your gospel
and powers and signs from nature.⁴³⁴
You mixed pigments for Your portrait.
You were observed by Yourself and You portray Yourself,⁴³⁵
O Painter Who also portrayed His Father in Himself!
The Two portray One Another.
- 3 Prophets, kings and priests, all of them created,
have portrayed You, though they were unlike You.
Created servants are not at all sufficient,
for You alone are sufficient to portray Yourself.
Your portrait has been fully drawn.⁴³⁶
You perfected it by Your advent.
The drawings were swallowed up by the strength of the pigments,
resplendent in all colors.
- 4 Faded is the drawing of the temporal lamb.

432. The strings played are on the harps of the Old and New Testaments and of nature; cf. Virg. 27.4, 29.4–5, the colophon to Virg. 30, CH 40 and Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 248f.

433. '(y)k' is otiose here and in Virg. 30.1, according to Beck.

434. That is, the *r'z'* of the Torah, the *tpnk'* of the gospels, and the *hyl'* and *rwsm'* nature, cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 249–54, but for different arrangements, cf. Virg. 20.12 and 30.1. Unlike the other terms, *tpnk'*, "original" or "prototype" is not used interchangeably with "type," "symbol" or "image," cf. *ibid.* 250–52 and Virg. 14.7.

435. The imagery of the mirror is added to the painting imagery, cf. Virg. 25.4–11, CH 32.17, and Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 249.

436. The root *rwsm*, "to draw, engrave," is introduced here; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 256–59.

HYMN 28

- Resplendent is the glory of the True Lamb.
Very weak too is the drawing of the staff
. . . the cross of light
. . . and the fixed serpent:
in the wilderness it portrayed the crucified body.⁴³⁷
The transitory symbols have been completed and swallowed up
by the truth that does not pass away.
- 5 The daybreak that is from You, the dawn that is from You
confined and swallowed . . .
By the shining forth of Your advent the shadows have been
illuminated.
- The types have come to an end, but the allusions persist.
The flash of the symbols has been swallowed up by Your rays.
Your symbols have passed away, but Your prophets have not passed
away.
- The [Jewish] people have erred in their reading of the prophets,
and they maintained that You were not You.
- 6 For You, Lord, it is easy to make ■ symbol;
even scripture has an image and a table.⁴³⁸
The images of kings do not pass away
when the king comes to his region.
Kings who slaughter kings
also efface and destroy their images.
Since our King is exalted, His images are in His Temples
and His images are among His possessions.
- 7 The scribes killed the Son of the King.
. . . another king
. . .
But they were unable [to make] another king.
They wanted to but could not make Him king.⁴³⁹
Oh, that they might know Who did not allow it!

437. Cf. Num. 21.8–9. The brazen serpent was seen by many early Christian writers as ■ type of Christ crucified; Tertullian, especially, invokes the image in the context of anti-Marcionite polemics, cf. Tert. adv. Marc. 2.22, 3.18, and de idol. 5.

438. The Syriac *dp'* may mean "board, tablet, leaf of ■ diptych" or "table, wooden altar," the former meaning continues the artistic imagery, the latter introduces an allusion to the Eucharist, Margoliouth, 96a.

439. John 6.15.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- How harsh is the necessity of our silent Lamb,
 Who was slain and did not cry out for help!⁴⁴⁰
- 8 They sought a king for themselves without a [divine] command.⁴⁴¹
 By force they wanted to lead God.
 How often they have killed kings and made others,
 and even others after them.
 In seven days they killed two kings,⁴⁴²
 and they have remained a long time without making another king.
 Behold, Daniel taught, "He is killed and [the people]
 had no other king again."⁴⁴³
- 9 The sword of Jezebel cut down prophets,⁴⁴⁴
 but the sword of Jehu cut down her sons.⁴⁴⁵
 The prophets of the Lord were massacred and discarded,
 but the sons of the king were massacred and heaped up.
 The prophets followed in order and did not cease;
 the kings were generated and were not diminished.
 What a disgraceful sight! that the source of those
 who crucified our Fount has dried up.
- 10 When the king of a region enters it,
 he adds a new image there,
 the images that stood for him having been [merely] a shadow.
 His lifestages pass away, but his images remain.
 An image is sculpted for his maturity.
 The prophets remain; His images do not pass away.
 By the Spirit [the image] is sculpted for the maturity of that One
 Who is portrayed in all the prototypes.
- 11 He is the glorious, immutable nature,
 but because of His love, He acquired changes.⁴⁴⁶
 Colors were put on: the symbols and types,
 and also all the prototypes and all the lifestages.

440. Cf. Isa. 53.7 and Virg. 11.18.

441. Cf. 1 Sam. 10.19.

442. The allusion is unclear; possibly as in the Book of Daniel where a "week" is to be taken as seven years.

443. Cf. Dan. 9.26.

444. 1 Kgs. 18.4.

445. 2 Kgs. 10.7-11.

446. Cf. de Halleux, *Mar Ephrem*, esp. 45-47; and Beck, *Reden*, 77-95, esp. 87f.

HYMN 28

The crucifiers saw Him and dishonored Him.⁴⁴⁷

The tares saw Him and made Him alien.⁴⁴⁸

The church has seen Him and, while knowing His nature,
worships His changes.

- 12 [God] saw, therefore, and dishonored that teaching
that refutes its [own] words of its own accord,
For the "Good" it called the "Alien,"
a name that is [to be taken] as opposed to His creature.
[These are] perceptions Marcion propounded for us—
[Marcion] by whom "Just" and "Good" and "Evil" are denied.
Let Your scripture confute him,
for the names of the Alien are not in Your book.

- 13 If He has no alien name,
He also has no impulse to alienation.
But if He had no name for His substance,
neither would He have a nature proper to Himself.
Our God has a name and a nature.
His names indicate His virtues:
Just by His word and God by His gifts
And Lord in His possessions.

- 14 Names are the simplest of all
But . . .
. . .
. . .
Our Lord's deeds and His names
that demand worship . . .
. . . necessarily depends
on the name of our God.

447. The Jews are meant.

448. The Marcionites are meant, as the following strophe makes clear.

29

Once again, the theme of this hymn is the three harps—this time with the emphasis on the harp of nature and the consistency of its song with the music of the two harps of scripture (str. 1–2). Anti-Marcionite polemics play an especially prominent role here. The raising of Lazarus shows, for example, that the Father of Jesus is not “Alien” but is the same as the Creator, since the resurrected human nature is essentially the same as created human nature (str. 2–3). Although the “temporal harp” of the Old Testament is inferior to the “true harp” of the New Testament, they play many of the same themes. Ephrem shows that some themes characteristic of the supposedly inferior God of the Old Testament are echoed in the New Testament: God’s regret and the language of sacrifice (str. 4–7). In addition, the harps of the Old Testament and nature proclaim the same Lord (str. 9). All three harps agree that some animals are despicable and that only the human being is universally honored (str. 11). Yet because the harp of Moses and the Law were too old and weak to restrain human licentiousness, God replaced Moses with Jesus (str. 10, 12, 13).

29

Seventeenth [on the same melody]

- 1 The Word⁴⁴⁹ of the Most High came down and put on
a weak body with hands,
and He took two harps
in His right and left hands.
The third He set up before Himself
to be a witness to the [other] two,

449. Although “word,” *mlt'*, is grammatically feminine, Ephrem sometimes treats it as masculine; cf. Beck, translation ad loc.

HYMN 29

for the middle harp taught
that their Lord is playing them.

Refrain: Glory to Your wise [decrees]!

- 2 He played, and that third harp
was harmonious and completed the [other] two.
When He awakened and revived Lazarus,⁴⁵⁰
the former nature was not changed.
If it were an imperfect nature,
why did He not perfect it and [then] awaken it?
It would have been very simple to perfect
in its restoration what was corrupt and ruined.
- 3 See, therefore, that here too the "Alien"⁴⁵¹
who awakened the dead was like the Creator.
It suffices that He did not fight against and change life,
but [rather] He changed the one who was awakened.
By one awakening He taught us three things:
of the Creator, of His servant . . .
. . .
. . .
- 4 Therefore our Savior played on that harp,
the old one of Moses and propounded its symbols.
. . .
- 5 Your hands, our Savior, have two harps:
the temporal harp and the true harp.⁴⁵²
. . .
He played new and old [songs].
How are symbolic mouths able to distinguish
wondrous tastes of every sort?
Whoever was sick was reproved, whoever was healthy was
overjoyed
by the sound of succor.
- 6 But the harp of Moses also sang
that the Lord regretted having made humankind.⁴⁵³

450. John 11.

451. The Marcionite term for the Father of Jesus.

452. The Old and New Testaments, respectively.

453. Gen. 6.6.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

The children of the left hand heard this and were perplexed.
They held that His nature was susceptible to regret.⁴⁵⁴

Likewise our Savior played the harp

that from Him the cup might pass away—⁴⁵⁵

[The cup] in which earlier He had rejoiced—and He clothed in a
hated name

Simon who [said], "Far be it from me!"⁴⁵⁶

- 7 The harp of Moses played and sang,
"God loves sacrifices."⁴⁵⁷

The apostle sang about the Son

that He had been a sacrifice to the Father⁴⁵⁸

. . .

- 8 . . .

- 9 Who has ever seen two harps,
one silent and one endowed with speech?⁴⁵⁹

But the silence of that one, its preaching,
was not heard by rational [creatures].

For the silent one persuaded by deed,

but the one endowed with speech [persuaded] by sound.

By words and by deeds both,

they proclaimed the Lord of all.

- 10 . . .

. . .

Few understood their power.

The harp was weary, and its hearers did not perceive
the power of the parables.

- 11 Moses wrote that the serpent was hateful,⁴⁶⁰
and our Lord came and set a seal on this.⁴⁶¹

Nature agreed with them since it hated [the serpent].

454. A Marcionite philosophical critique of the God of the Jewish scripture as anthropomorphic.

455. Cf. Mark 14.36 et par.

456. Cf. Matt. 16.22.

457. Cf. Gen. 8.21 and the same issue against the Marcionites in CH 30.2 and 36.13, as noted by Beck.

458. Eph. 5.2 and the same citation and argument in CH 36.7, again noted by Beck.

459. The former is nature, the latter the Old Testament.

460. Gen. 3.14; as in str. 7 above, Beck has noted the same argument and counter argument in CH 43.4f.

461. Luke 10.19, and cf. CH 43.5, as per Beck.

HYMN 29

The three voices agreed with one another.
 To the Creator this animal was despicable,
 but pigs were despicable to our Savior.⁴⁶²
 Nature agreed with them that the human being alone is chosen
 to be honored by all.

- 12 Error also constructed harps
 that sweetly played [feigned] temperance,⁴⁶³
 and they heard and were overjoyed like babes
 whose wills are unbridled
 and whose inner impulses were loosed
 and whose untamed senses were overcome.
 The voice of the Law became for them
 the droning of a harp.⁴⁶⁴
- 13 [God] saw that the old man Moses could not
 play this harp any more.
 He put to rest and thrust out the obsolete old man
 and He gazed at Jesus whose name was [new,
 and all of the prophets] . . .

. . .

462. Mark 5.13 et par.; cf. CH 43.6 as per Beck.

463. The allusion is to the teachings of Bardaisan, cf. Beck ad loc. CH 1.11 and 1.17.

464. Cf. Virg. 27.3.

30

Christ plays the three harps together blending their music into a harmony pleasing to healthy ears but unpleasant to the unhealthy (str. 1–3). Just as Saul could not endure the music of David, the Marcionites and Jews dislike the music of Christ, the Son of David (str. 2). But, in reality, the three voices are harmonious; by the miracles of the New Testament nature attests its unity with both Testaments (str. 4). The miracles of the New Testament teach a further lesson about human freedom: Specifically the taming of the sea, the incident with the Gadarene swine, and the cursing of the fig tree, in contrast to the treatment of the beloved disciple, teach us to appreciate our unique position in the creation as recipients of grace and freedom (str. 5–9). The hymn ends with an eloquent and paradoxical meditation on the incarnation: Christ is son of both the dead Adam and the living God; by being bound, he released those bound by sin; having lost the garment of his body in death, he sought and found it among the dead (str. 11–12).

30

- 1 But who has seen our Lord and admired
 His playing on three harps?
 He blends their counterpoint wisely
 lest their hearers be alienated:
 signs, symbols and prototypes,⁴⁶⁵
 so that nature and scripture may convince.
 With the one creation He bound together two Testaments
 to put the doubters to shame.

465. For "prototype," cf. Virg. 14.7 and note ad loc. and Virg. 28.2.

HYMN 30

Refrain: Praise to the Omniscient!

- 2 Already drawn on the harp of David
was also the harp of the Son of David,
for while he played and sang,
Saul's melancholy ears could not endure [it];⁴⁶⁶
by the spirit within him Saul was saddened.
As Saul against David, therefore,
the ears of tares and scribes⁴⁶⁷
stood on end against the Son of David.
- 3 They heard, therefore, that the Lord of all was coming,
and they were confused as weak men.
How much the healthy melodies multiplied
for the healthy ear . . .
. . .
but both new and old annoyed [the sick ear].
It therefore escaped and rejected all things of the Law
and most of the things of the Savior.⁴⁶⁸
- 4 If what makes you wander is the voice of Moses,
the voice of our Lord will gather you.
But if the two voices trouble you,
nature, with which they are bound together, will testify:
The sea and the wind and even death that has been conquered,⁴⁶⁹
the bread that is multiplied that persuaded those who ate it,⁴⁷⁰
so that dust might be the bread of doubters
who alienate the Judge of all.
- 5 Free human beings are not, then, more difficult
than that great sea that obeyed.
He dammed up with a Word the mouth that cried out
against sailors and ships.
He coerced the sea, the nature of which is subject.

466. 1 Sam. 19.9–10.

467. The tares are heretics, here the Marcionites; cf. Beck, *Bildtheologie*, 249f. The scribes are singled out as they are the ancestors of the leaders of rabbinic Judaism. Both Marcionites and Ephrem's Jewish contemporaries reject the Christological reading of the Old Testament.

468. The Marcionites rejected the Old Testament and most of the New Testament, retaining only a modified form of Luke's gospel and the Pauline epistles.

469. Mark 6.45–52 et par.

470. Mark 6.30–44 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- He did not coerce the generation whose will rules.
By the two of them⁴⁷¹ He taught compulsion and freedom,
nature and will.
- 6 Whatever is coerced, the force that coerces it
shows that its nature is to be commanded.
Whatever is contested, its contesting
teaches that it is entirely concerned with freedom.
He compelled the herd of swine and sent it,⁴⁷²
but He did not compel freedom to learn.
With demons and swine He taught us how much He loves
the human race.
- 7 He permitted the legion [of demons] as requested,⁴⁷³
to be dishonored in that herd of swine.
Our race He made great, and in John
He even caressed and put us on his breast.⁴⁷⁴
Although the evil one has freedom,
with a means that is not his He coerced him,⁴⁷⁵
for in himself⁴⁷⁶ the defiled one rules
by the impulse of his freedom.
- 8 Let the synagogue learn that she is not more difficult
than the wind that is on the sea.
A fearful [wind] blew, but He coerced and bound it,⁴⁷⁷
[He] Who rebuked unrestrained freedom.
The substance⁴⁷⁸ of the fig tree was fresh green;
He cursed the fig tree gratuitously to let us know;⁴⁷⁹
as a harsh Judge He encountered the fig tree to teach us
that toward us He is gentle.
- 9 Therefore while He is just, to us He is gracious,

471. The sea, on the one hand, free human beings, on the other. On human freedom, cf. Nat. 1.98, Virg. 20.5, 25.7, and notes ad loc.

472. Mark 5.8 et par.

473. Mark 5.9–13, et par. "Legion" is normally feminine in Syriac, but here it is treated as masculine.

474. John 13.25; cf. Virg. 25.

475. The "means" of coercing Satan is apparently the swine, as Beck suggests.

476. Or in his actual existence, his reality, his *gnwm*'. Since the apparent compulsion of Satan in the expulsion of the demons from the swine is inconsistent with the free will that Ephrem attributes to him, the incident is treated here as an exception.

477. Mark 6.45–52 et par.

478. Or "nature," *kyn*'.

479. Mark 11.20–25 et par.

HYMN 30

and although He is indeed harsh, for us He is humble.
 With respect to this fig tree He dealt
 neither with grace nor with justice.

Let the oppressed cry then how much He oppresses.

. . . did not give

. . .

the Physician of His crucifiers.

- 10 With nails they fastened You, but You made them
 like medicines for their pains.

They pierced You with a lance and water flowed forth,⁴⁸⁰
 as the blotting out of their sins.

Water and blood came out to make them fearful
 and to wash their hands with Your blood.

The Slain One gave water from His blood to His slayers
 [so that] they would be purified [and] at rest.⁴⁸¹

- 11 You are also the son of the dead and bound father,⁴⁸²
 whom the Son of the Living Father released.
 The Good One Who was bound released the bad.

. . .

The bound were released by One bound;
 the crucifiers were saved by the Crucified.
 For the crops that were stored up by sinners
 there are springs of assistance.

- 12 The result of Your death is full of life.
 You released the captives of Your captivity.
 Your body You stripped off, my Lord, and as you lost it,
 among the dead You descended and sought it.
 Death was amazed at You in Sheol,
 that You sought Your garment and found [it].⁴⁸³
 O Wise One Who lost what was found
 in order to find the lost!⁴⁸⁴

480. John 19.34.

481. An allusion to baptism.

482. Adam.

483. On the imagery of garments, cf. Nat. 3.9, 28.7, Virg. 37.6 and notes ad loc.

484. The postscript reads, "Completed are the three hymn on our Lord's symbols that are seen in the Old and New [Testaments] and [in] nature."

31

Although the manuscript entitles this hymn, “On the Birth of Our Lord,” it is more properly on the births of our Lord, which is to say, on baptism! In his sermon on our Lord, Ephrem enumerates four births of Christ: the generation from the Father, the birth from Mary in the incarnation, the baptism by John, and the emergence from Sheol at the resurrection. Thus the entire economy of salvation is encompassed by the notions of birth, and conversely, baptism becomes symbolic of each of the stages of the divine plan.⁴⁸⁵ This hymn elaborates some of these ideas while arguing the superiority of Christian baptism to the Jewish understandings of forgiveness. Beginning with the double birth of Christ, from the Father and from Mary (str. 1), Ephrem proceeds to portray Christ as Good Steward, High Priest, Hyssop, Sacrificial Lamb, Treasure, Rock, Balance, Justifying Wall, Levelling Gate, Yoke, Mirror, Cluster of Mercy, Staff of Wheat and Skilled Sailor (str. 2–15). Throughout, he stresses the superiority of grace to the Law (esp. str. 6), while still emphasizing the rigor of the final judgment (esp. str. 9). He ends on a personal note with a paean to the beauties of everyday life and a lament to the inadequacy of his hymns to express due gratitude (str. 16–17).

31

ON THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD

To the melody, “I fear to chant glory”

- 1 Christ, You have given life to the creation by Your birth
that took place openly from a womb of flesh.
Christ, you dazzled understanding by Your birth
that shone forth from eternity from the hidden womb.⁴⁸⁶

485. Cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 98–101.

486. That is, the generation by God the Father; cf. *Naṭ.* 13.7, 21.7–8, 27.15 and 19.

HYMN 31

I am amazed by You in two [ways]: The wandering find life in You,
but investigators⁴⁸⁷ go astray in You.

Refrain: Glory to You, my Lord, and to Your Father!

- 2 Good Steward of Your merciful Father
in Your hand is the key of the treasury of His mercy.
You open [it] and make enter the offerings of all.
You open [it] and make emerge pardon for all.
Blessed is the one who put his offering into Your hand
and takes mercy in its place.
- 3 By You, then, Being Itself is served in the Holy of holies.
You took up the sacrifice and sprinkled the libation.
Do not reject our sacrifice due to flaws in it.
Our prayer is a sacrifice, and our libation is weeping.
Blessed is the one who sends up his sacrifices in Your hand
and the smell of whose incense is sweetened by You.
- 4 Purifying Sprinkling, Pardoning Hyssop,
Who pardons all their sins in a baptism of water!
All the sprinklings of the Levites are unable
to pardon one People with their weak hyssops.
Blessed are the peoples [whose] hyssop was the Merciful One,
Who purified them with mercy.⁴⁸⁸
- 5 Desirable Offering offered for us!
Sanctified Sacrifice which He offered: Himself!
Libation Who made the blood of calves and sheep pass away!
Lamb Who was the offering Priest for Himself!
Blessed is the One Whose intercession became a censer
and was offered by You to Your Father!
- 6 The Law of the People rejects outward blemishes;
the grace He chose for the peoples tolerates their blemishes.
Blemishes are not chosen by [grace]; it receives penitents.
Your beauty, Lord, without blemish will not espouse our blemishes,

487. That is, the Arians. This is Ephrem's usual designation of them; cf. Beck, Reden, 111-18.

488. Cf. Saber, Theologie, 46, 108.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- Blessed is the one who cleanses his stains by Your hand
and makes himself entirely pleasing by You.⁴⁸⁹
- 7 Rich Treasure Who came to the needy!
Streaming Font Who flowed to the thirsty!
Wise Instruction Who came to the simple!
Memory Who chased error from the creation!
Blessed is the one who knows Who You are, O Christ,
and acquires You and was purchased by You.
- 8 Blessed are You upon Whom rests hope that was cut off.
You are the Rock on which is built the building of the peoples,
the Balance into which is gathered a distracted mind.
the Justifying Wall that stands before the weak.
Blessed is the one who perceives how and how much You have loved
him
and who has wept and blushed that he has rejected You.
- 9 Levelling Gate that separates.
Therefore in this world everyone enters by it into truth,
but in the other world it separates and gives entry to life.
In this world His mercy equalizes; in the next He will separate by
His judgment.
Blessed is the one who remembers His expulsion in every moment
and increases the provisions for his way.
- 10 The Reproving Furnace, Who does not receive the peoples
in the presence of the household of the People,
investigates, tests and separates.
The fraud of the People entered and was unmasked and rejected.
The truth of the peoples entered and was believed and chosen.
Blessed is the one who became judge for himself
and in You he reproved himself!
- 11 O Yoke Who set free the subjected freedmen,
deceased while performing a hidden service.
They hated the yoke of open service.
They sold their freedom, and they sold their service.
Blessed is the one who seized his captivity with Your help
and by You took captive his captivity.

489. In this strophe Jewish Law is strongly contrasted with the grace of Christ; for ■
thorough study of this issue in Ephrem's works, cf. Martikainen, *Gerechtigkeit*.

HYMN 31

- 12 Clear Mirror⁴⁹⁰ constituted for the peoples.
 They acquired a hidden eye, approached and contemplated it.
 They saw their hatred; they reproached them[selves].
 Their faults they scoured in it; their ornaments they beautified in it.
 Blessed is the one who confuted his hatred by Your beauty,
 and Your resemblance was imprinted on him.⁴⁹¹
- 13 The Cluster of mercy, glorified in the vineyard,
 Who refused labor but seized [its] fruits
 for the one who gave Him gall, shared His sweetness.
 He was trampled and gave the medicine of life to the peoples.
 Blessed is the One Who gave drink from the sober grape⁴⁹²
 and was not despised in secret.
- 14 The beautiful Staff that grew among the ugly tares
 gave the bread of life without toil to the hungry.⁴⁹³
 He released the curse that held Him captive in Adam
 to eat by sweat the bread of pains and thorns.
 Blessed is he who eats from His blessed bread
 and makes pass away from him the curse.
- 15 Skilled Sailor Who has conquered the raging sea,⁴⁹⁴
 Your glorious wood is a standard; it has become the rudder of life.
 Your wind⁴⁹⁵ of mercy blew; the ships set straight out
 from the raging sea to the harbor of peace.
 Blessed is he who has become a sailor for himself,⁴⁹⁶
 has preserved and brought forth his treasure [on dry land].
- 16 But remaining are all those things the Gracious One made in His
 mercy.
 Let us see those things that He does for us every day!
 How many tastes for the mouth! How many beauties for the eye!
 How many melodies for the ear! How many scents for the nostrils!

490. For the image of the mirror as a means to self-knowledge and moral improvement, cf. Beck, *Spiegel*, and idem, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 268–73.

491. Cf. Nat. 1.99, 12.3, 28.7 and notes ad loc.

492. On vineyard imagery, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 95–130, and on sober inebriation, cf. Virg. 24.7 and note ad loc.

493. Cf. Nat. 4.31.

494. For the nautical imagery, cf. Virg. 20.1 and note ad loc.; for translation and comment on this strophe, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 251f.

495. Or “Your Spirit of mercy.”

496. Or “for his soul.”

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Who is sufficient in comparison to the goodness
of these little things?

- 17 Who is able to make thousands of remunerations in a day?
[Even] if there dwell in him a great spring of words,
he will be unable by words and melodies to make
the great remuneration of every hour,
O Gracious Cheated One, Who, although cheated daily,
does not cease to do good!⁴⁹⁷

497. The postscript reads, "Completed is one hymn on the birthday of our Lord."

This hymn is a series of thanksgivings by persons and places related to the beginning of the synoptic gospels. Two theological themes appear consistently here: the wonder of the incarnation and the fulfillment of Old Testament types in Jesus. Nazareth, birthplace of Jesus, attests his divinity and humanity (str. 1). As remarkable as the fact that Simeon, "the old priest," is able to carry the divine Infant, is our ability to hold him in the Eucharist (str. 2). Egypt witnesses the fulfillment of the types of Joseph and Moses by Jesus (str. 4). John the Baptist passes on the priesthood to him (str. 5). Christ's victory over Satan's temptations is definitive (str. 6–7). The town of Bethsaida has given over her fishermen to Christ, the fisher of all (str. 8–9).

32

On the melody, "The heavenly assembly"

- 1 Nazareth thanks You that she was worthy of Your birth.
O Nazarene, she offers Your childhood a crown,
and she offers another crown to Your hiddenness.⁴⁹⁸
By Your conception in the womb, she was first aware
of Your pure woven garment
and Your pleasing plaited crown:
the name and the body that completed You.

498. Here Ephrem expresses poetically the divine and human aspects of Christ [without the technical terminology of post-Chalcedonian theology, of course]. Childhood, body and garment represent the humanity; hiddenness, the name and the crown represent the divinity.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

*Refrain: Our Lord, make me worthy to send up praise
with the righteous on the day of Your coming.*

- 2 O the old high priest,⁴⁹⁹ ordered to bear Your strength.
Bearer, One borne Who resembles His bearers.
Infant Who adorns the arms of old age,
permit me, too, my Lord, to lift You up in Your bread.⁵⁰⁰
O Mountain Who [so] willed and was borne
that by handfuls Your sea might be contained
and Your fire embraced in the bosom.
- 3 With all infants I confess that He dwells in me.
With the blessed name of Nazareth He called a people.⁵⁰¹
Into His kingdom and His glory may He have me enter with the
just,
and among the fearful Watchers . . .
. . .
. . .
and with the children . . . He exulted.
- 4 Egypt thanks Him for He has made her worthy—
[she] who lifted Joseph the just into the chariot.
Behold the Lord of Joseph on a humble lap.
Moses the persecuted babe! Our Lord the persecuted infant!
Put to shame was Pharaoh who had threatened Moses,
and [put to shame were] Herod who plotted against our Lord
and Satan who by his instruments was mocked.⁵⁰²
- 5 Levitical lamp sent before the sun!
Servant who was ordered to baptize his Lord
but who waited for the Holy Spirit to descend
to dwell upon the Great One Who had become small!

499. The Syriac word used here, *kwmr'*, usually designates a pagan priest in contrast to a priest of Israel. Here Ephrem refers to Simeon, who is not a priest, but a prophet; cf. Luke 2.25–35. Nevertheless, he is seen by Ephrem as a transmitter of the Jewish priesthood to Christ; cf. Nat. 9.3, Virg. 15.7 and notes ad loc.

500. Ephrem refers to the eucharistic bread. Beck takes this as evidence that Ephrem's contemporaries received the bread in their hands. This is probable, cf. Virg. 33.7, but it is also possible that Ephrem speaks here as a deacon.

501. Ephrem seems to imply that Christians are known as Nazarenes or Nazoreans. This was generally true at an earlier time, but in this late fourth-century context probably constitutes evidence of the Jewish-Christian features of Syrian Christianity; on "Nazorean," cf. Brown, Messiah, 208–19, 223–25.

502. Cf. Matt. 2.

HYMN 32

- Let this persuade [us] that John who baptized Him was exalted,
and pardoned was the servant who bathed⁵⁰³ Him;
sanctified [was] the river that received Him.⁵⁰⁴
- 6 The aspects of His temptations increase His crownings,
and three crowns will rejoice greatly three times
from the wilderness and the mountain and the pinnacle of the
Temple:
The crown of His victory ascended to the Father Who sent Him
for the sake of our spirit that wandered and returned,
for the sake of our soul that was lost and was found,
for the sake of our body that sinned and was pardoned.⁵⁰⁵
- 7 It is sad and harsh for the evil one over whom You were victorious.
He went back and donned enticement in his humiliation,
and the perversity of his rebellious mouth was rebuked.
In the disciple, his instrument, he came to conquer but was
conquered.
In the thief who betrayed You and was hanged
and that mouth that watered You and was shut off
and that lap that gathered and scattered.
- 8 Bethsaida offers a crown to the Fisher of all.⁵⁰⁶
The Fisher of all caught her to fish with her fishermen.
[Then] they made a catch for the belly but [now] for the kingdom.
Twelve fishermen went out; they caught the world.
They fished for kings from the sea of bile
and freemen from the abyss of desire
and servants from the trickle of evil.
- 9 City of fishermen, you who are [merely] a handful,
in the net you have gathered the inhabited earth by your fishermen
so that you kindled the fire of our Lord in the world.
You devoured and wiped away the handful of interwoven thorns;
you devoured the idols that did not breathe

503. A pun on *hs'*, "pardoned," and *sh'*, "bathed." John the Baptist is portrayed by Ephrem as a transmitter of the Levitical priesthood to Jesus, cf. Virg. 15.1–2.

504. Cf. Virg. 15.3 and note ad loc.

505. Ephrem uses the threefold temptation of Christ as an occasion to present his tripartite anthropology. Human beings consist of spirit, soul and body, and all three are redeemed through Christ. On Ephrem's anthropology, cf. Nat. 22.40 and note ad loc.

506. In this strophe Ephrem plays on various words formed from the root, *šwd*, "to catch" or "to fish." Further, cf. Nat. 4.35 and note ad loc.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

and the sorcerors and diviners so they did not chant
the soothsayers and familiar spirits so they did not murmur.⁵⁰⁷

507. The postscript reads, "The end of one hymn on Nazareth."

The subject of this hymn is the so-called nature miracles, as opposed to healing miracles of Jesus. While these stories in themselves stress the dominion of Christ over nature, the hymn's emphasis on nuptial and royal imagery intensifies the triumphant eschatological tone. The initial strophes (str. 1–3) describing the wedding feast at Cana and the miracle of the changing of water into wine, introduce not only the theme of the Son's power over Nature but also the nuptial and *adventus* themes: The church is the bride of Christ and “in her magnificence she portrays [his] advent.” His sovereignty over death and Sheol is illustrated by the raising of the widow's son in Nain (str. 4–5). The multiplication of loaves and the miraculous catches of fish show the abundance of His blessings as well as His might (str. 6–8). Finally, the walking on water is presented in conjunction with the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the rout of the demons as a royal *adventus*, a victorious procession of the ruler of the sea and the land and the height and the depth (str. 9–10).

33

The second on the same melody

- 1 Let Cana thank You for gladdening her banquet!
 The bridegroom's crown exalted You for exalting it,
 and the bride's crown belonged to Your victory.
 In her mirror allegories are expounded and traced,⁵⁰⁸
 for You portrayed Your church in the bride,
 and in her guests, Yours⁵⁰⁹ are traced,
 and in her magnificence she portrays Your advent.⁵¹⁰

508. The mirror brings hidden and symbolic truths into visibility; further on “mirror,” *mḥzyr'*, and “allegory,” *pl'r*, cf. Virg. 11.1, 25.9 and 31.12 and Beck, *Bildtheologie*, esp. 264–73.

509. Ephrem uses two different words for guest here, *ḥrp* and *zmn*.

510. For the language of painting and drawing here, based on the roots *ṣwr* and *rsm*, cf. Nat. 8.2, Virg. 2.15, 24.5,7, 25.4–11, 31.12, and notes ad loc.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

Refrain: Make even me worthy that by Your garments I may enter, our Lord, Your glorious bridal chamber!

- 2 Let the feast thank Him for in multiplying His wine.
Six miracles were beheld there:
the six wine jugs set aside for water
into which they invited the King to pour His wine.
Blessed is the guest
who ignored the bride's beauty
to contemplate You, our Lord, [and] how fair You are.
- 3 "I am grateful to be found worthy to invite him among my guests—
that Heavenly Bridegroom Who descended and invited all.⁵¹¹
To enter His pure feast I am invited.
Among the generations I shall confess that He is the Bridegroom
and there is no other,
and His bridal chamber is prior to the ages,
and His feast is rich and not wanting—
unlike my banquet that was lacking and He filled it."
- 4 Nain, may you worship Him; may you offer Him a crown.
With that dead man who lives may you crown life.⁵¹²
The deed of our Lord is the crown of his crowning.
Death was crowned as it conquered the youth
who marched with his crowns into Sheol;
he completed the victory when he returned it
to that Voice Who summoned him and revived him.
- 5 Even dusty city walls were polished by the All-conquering.
Even the dark gates were gladdened by the All-smiting.
Even the mourning crowds were rejoicing in the All-merciful,
and those who had wept for the dead man, lifted up and carried⁵¹³
the living man.
He consoled the widow and made her rejoice,
and He gladdened the city and enlightened it,
but He made Sheol gloomy and sorrowful.
- 6 Let the field in which bread multiplied thank Him.⁵¹⁴

511. Cana, personified as a woman, or possibly the bride, speaks. For nuptial themes in Ephrem and other early Syriac literature, cf. Murray, *Symbols*, 131–58.

512. Cf. Luke 7.11–17.

513. The Syriac reverses the order of these verbs.

514. Cf. Mark 6.30–44 and 8.1–10 et par.

HYMN 33

The hungry were satisfied and had provisions left over; they took them up and went away.

Their provisions that they received announced You in their cities. Your bread of barleys was more desirable than the king's table.

Blessed is the one who was worthy to eat it.

Blessed is the one who wondered and did not eat to contemplate You, our Lord, with awe.

- 7 The two ships⁵¹⁵ were filled with allegories
as a symbol of hands and feet and ears and eyes,
that ears might be filled [with] truth at every moment
and eyes might be filled with modesty at all times,
and hands might take Your body,⁵¹⁶
and feet trample a path to Your house,
and all of them might exist for Your glory.

- 8 The sea crowns You by the catch it offers You.
Like blossoms it mingled all sorts and offered [them] to You.
It filled two ships as a symbol: it gathered and heaped
the net of the apostles with a symbol of one hundred fifty fish.⁵¹⁷
It emulates the harp of the prophets
who wove a varied crown
of one hundred fifty psalms.

- 9 The sea became calm, an expanse without disruption.
The Pure One went down to walk into this calm [expanse].
The sea wove its waves [into] a crown for God.⁵¹⁸
It saw Him walking on the water and hastened to crown Him;
He entered its currents, it bore Him in state and lifted Him up,
and to the land, its neighbor, it held Him out.
The land emulated the sea and exalted Him.

- 10 For You a desirable way was made smooth in the sea,
and a clear way was adorned on dry land.
Before the feet of our Lord the sea smoothed its waves,⁵¹⁹

515. Cf. Luke 5.7.

516. This is a better confirmation of Beck's surmise that the Eucharist was received in the hand than Virg. 32.2, q.v.

517. Cf. John 21.11.

518. From this point on, the *adventus* imagery becomes increasingly prominent; further on this subject, cf. Sabine G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*. The Transformation of the Classical Heritage I (Berkeley, 1981), esp. 4-73.

519. Cf. Mark 6.45-52 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

the land carried [Him] and before Him it took and spread out
garments.

The waves saw You and were calmed,
and the garments saw You and were spread out.

[Both] waves and garments honored You.⁵²⁰

11 By You sea and land were subjugated, and they carried You—
a powerful chariot harnessed without a yoke.

A herd of demons roaming on the land saw [this];
into hogs they fled, entered [and] hid, but they did not escape.⁵²¹

The land rejoiced to see their humiliation.

The sea danced for joy . . . at their disgrace.

The height and the depth saw their ruin.

520. Cf. Mark 11.1–11, esp. 7–8, et par.

521. Cf. Mark 5.1–20 et par. They fled from the man to the hogs, which then rushed into the sea and drowned.

In this hymn Ephrem explores the familiar theme of Judaism, Christianity and the call of the Gentiles, this time relating it to authority and martyrdom. First he introduces some women and cities representative of the ethnic and religious groups. The woman with the hemorrhage and the daughter of Jairus are types of the Old and New Testaments, respectively (str. 1–3). Then a series of cities populated by Gentiles are portrayed offering homage to Christ: The city of Ephrem, was a place of refuge for Him (str. 4); Through the Samaritan woman, Shechem was brought from error to truth (str. 5–6); Tyre, Sidon and the cities of the Decapolis are favorably contrasted with Capharnaum and Jerusalem (str. 7). In an apparent change of direction, Ephrem turns to the rebuff of the request of the sons of Zebedee (str. 8). The connection is possibly the statement he has omitted—that Jesus reproaches them for wanting to rule over their fellows as if they were Gentiles.⁵²² Instead Ephrem substitutes other models for the same lesson: children and angels (str. 9). Rather than promotion from above, the will is the proper means for attaining true greatness (str. 10), and martyrdom is the greatest exaltation, as James and John learned (str. 11). But Ephrem ends with a reproach to his congregation: Far from being ready for martyrdom, they are doubtful and contentious and have fallen prey to Arian beliefs (str. 12).

34

The same melody

- 1 The woman with the hemorrhage feared to approach the Lord of
all.⁵²³

She was encouraged by the One Who encouraged sinners.

522. Cf. Mark 10.42 et par.

523. Cf. Mark 5.25–34 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

In her wish He perceived that she wanted to delight in Him.⁵²⁴
 He happened upon her faith [but] He was present since He willed
 it.

Her blood flowed, but her love was restrained.
 As to her blood, she rejoiced that He dried it up,
 but as to the font of her love, [she rejoiced] that He made it flow.

- 2 Let the daughter of Jairus give thanks, let her offer the crown.⁵²⁵

Young women extend their crowns to kings,
 and in images Victory is portrayed by a maiden.⁵²⁶

You have conquered the death of Eve in the daughter of Eve.⁵²⁷
 Instead of Eve she crowns You.

Receive the glorious crown that she has offered,
 and by You let it ascend to Your Father with our praises.

- 3 A great wonder has met me if I will be able to tell it:
 that the maiden who lay dead before You
 and the woman whom You healed behind You [constitute] a type.
 From behind You and before You they offer crowns.

The allegories that crown You
 are the two Testaments that adorn You,
 the Old and the New that praise You.

- 4 The inheritance of the house of Ephrem thanks You
 for visiting the distant city of Ephrem.⁵²⁸

It was a city far removed from the crucifiers.
 So that Your multitude might escape from the wolves and be
 refreshed,

the city became a peaceful harbor for Your ship.
 For the sake of allowing Your persecuted flock to rest,
 may You bring it to the harbor of life.

- 5 And let Shechem worship Him; let her offer Him a crown,
 for upon the well He sat;⁵²⁹ from the deep He lifted her up.
 A hidden whirlpool swallowed her but she was silent,
 for the mouth of the well had secretly seized her daughter.

524. In this line Ephrem puns on words with the root *šb'*, "to will or wish."

525. Cf. Mark 5.21–43 et par.

526. Ephrem refers to the portrayal of Nike, frequent on coins and other imperial art.

527. That is, by raising the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

528. Cf. John 11.54, and Virg. 20.1, for the same scriptural allusion paired with the image of the harbor.

529. Cf. John 4.1–42, esp. 6.

HYMN 34

- From the depth of error He silenced her.
 Without a bucket, since she had none, he gave her to drink
 teaching from the depth of His wisdom.
- 6 He revealed to her the structure of her pretenses, and she was
 amazed.⁵³⁰
- A Ploughman, Who was pleased not to sow, chose
 that field of reproaches that stood without a worker.
 The shame of five ploughmen [of whom] she was bereft⁵³¹ passed
 away.
- She did not force [the sixth husband] lest he should die,
 and this man feared to take her.
 Our Lord is the One Who revealed their secret.
- 7 Daughter of Tyre, worship Him, and Sidon that He did not
 enter.⁵³²
- Crowns came to Him from the ten cities.⁵³³
 Capharnaum renounced Him, and He renounced it in all the
 woes.⁵³⁴
- In Sodom and in Tyre He reproached the haughty land.⁵³⁵
 Our Lord put to shame the Canaanite woman
 whose love bellowed out so that she asked Him.⁵³⁶
 To Jerusalem that cried out to crucify Him [be shame].
- 8 Let the place thank Him where the sons of Zebedee asked.⁵³⁷
 What they were seeking He sought; what they were asking He took.
 He plundered their treasures and showed their treasure.
 The astute innocent believed about Him not as they saw.
 They called the Persecuted One "the Word,"

530. We, too, may be amazed at Ephrem's innovative interpretation of Jesus' words to the woman at the well, cf. Virg. 22.4–15.

531. The Syriac is active.

532. Jesus did not enter the city of Sidon to heal the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter; cf. Mark 7.24–30 et par.

533. The Decapolis, a commercial and political league of ten independent cities of Transjordan; the participant cities are variously enumerated in ancient sources, cf. J. Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton, 1969), 61–70. For Jesus' healing there, cf. Mark 7.31–37 et par.

534. Ephrem puns on *kpr*, "to renounce", and the name of the city of Capharnaum, which he then uses as a symbol of Jewish rejection of Jesus. For Jesus' curse of Capharnaum, cf. Matt. 11.20–24 et par.

535. As Beck suggests, probably Sidon and Tyre are meant here, cf. Matt. 11.20–22.

536. She asked Him to cure her daughter, cf. Matt. 15.21–28, esp. 24f.

537. Mark 10.35–45 et par.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- and also the Judged One [they called] "Lord" and "Son,"
and the Crucified One "God" and "man."
- 9 When the disciples hastened to the throne of the ruler,
He showed them a child who receives orders without becoming
angry
and [who], like the Watchers, serves without murmuring.
Since the Watchers do not have thrones,⁵³⁸
our Lord refused [to bestow] apparent majesty,
and to true majesty He counseled them:
to look at children and become great.⁵³⁹
- 10 The treasure of freedom exceeds a gift,
and the treasury of [free] will [exceeds] the gift of grace.⁵⁴⁰
"You have in you [the capacity] to be greater," our Lord said.
Who will measure how much the great will may increase?⁵⁴¹
Our Lord restrains; His [will] holds them.
lest He bury His [will] by theirs.⁵⁴²
They acquired His, but they were exalted by theirs.
- 11 Those who received majesty but did not assume it, were greatly
exalted,
for complete love is reproved but is not turned aside.
He Who refused their request increased their love.
He had refused majesty, but He gave them what is great.
He shut the gate to show their steadfastness.
When they pressed, they did not receive;
by their death they opened it and entered alive.
- 12 But we, on the other hand, have seen His majesty.
If our eye had seen Him beaten, we would be sickened.
The disciples loved Him in the mocking of Herod.
In our time kings have worshipped Him,⁵⁴³ but we have been
doubtful and suspicious.

538. Only God is enthroned in heaven, not the "Watchers," angels, who stand attentively in his presence, cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 126–28. On the larger question whether the distinct groups of angels are hierarchically arranged among themselves or whether they are merely functionally distinguished among themselves and hierarchically ranked with respect to God and humans, cf. *ibid.* 81–108, and Beck, *Reden*, 107–110.

539. Cf. Matt. 18.1–4, 19.13–15 et par.

540. Cf. Nat. 1.98, Virg. 20.5, 25.7, 30.5–8 and notes ad loc.

541. On the power of the will, cf. Nat. 4.140–42.

542. Although humans have freedom, this does not negate Divine Providence.

543. Constantine and his sons.

HYMN 34

Contentious generation!⁵⁴⁴ How much you have gone astray
that you proclaim ■ creature as Creator
and preach the Lord as a fellow servant!⁵⁴⁵

544. The Syriac has two nouns rather than a noun with adjective. Ephrem reproaches the Arians, as the following lines indicate clearly.

545. The postscript, "Completed is one hymn on Cana," should have followed the previous hymn.

35

This hymn begins with three scriptural personalities associated with the city of Jericho: Zacchaeus, the blind Bar Timaeus, and Rahab (str. 1). Although Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore tree, Ephrem associates him with the subsequent pericope of the cursing of the fig tree and contrasts the fig tree with the branches of palm waved by the crowd upon Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (str. 2). Returning to the idea of Bar Timaeus, the third strophe introduces the Johannine account of the healing of a blind man. Consideration of the reaction of the Jewish leadership to this incident leads him to attack the Pharisees and justify Jesus' abrogation of the sabbath as a means of saving the weak and sinful, such as the penitent woman of Luke's gospel. Through association of this incident with the anointing at Bethany, Ephrem is led to Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Finally, focusing on the Mount of Olives and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Ephrem plays on the contrast between those who recognize Jesus as Christ and the Jewish authorities who did not.

35

The same melody

- 1 Jericho, worship him; offer him a crown.
By the mouth of the short Zacchaeus,⁵⁴⁶ extend praise,
and by the voice of Bar Timaeus⁵⁴⁷ extend thanksgiving,
and with the splendid thread of Rahab⁵⁴⁸ gird on his crown.
By means of Rahab who was saved, sing his praise;

⁵⁴⁶. Cf. Luke 19.1–10.

⁵⁴⁷. Cf. Mark 10.46–52; Matthew has two men, cf. Matt. 20.29–34; in Luke he is unnamed, Luke 18.35–43.

⁵⁴⁸. Josh. 2.

HYMN 35

- by Bar Timaeus, who saw, glorify him,
and in Zacchaeus who conquered,⁵⁴⁹ crown him.
- 2 The fig tree that he climbed deserved curses,
for the leaves of scorn stretched out to the guilty.⁵⁵⁰
The children did not take from its branches for [their] praise,⁵⁵¹
since the leaves of the fig tree were not suitable for a conqueror's
praise.
- The guilty who were acquitted ran to it,
and exiles who were stripped took refuge in it,
and the agitated who stumbled hid in it.
- 3 A wonder sprouted in the place where He spat
that from clay He made salves for the eyes.⁵⁵²
He took and cast dust on the eyes, and they were opened.
O Healer Who opened [the eyes of] the blind man with a speck!
The priests were jealous that he abrogated the sabbath,
for its abrogation bound them.⁵⁵³
[Those] who disputed, were bound and stifled.
- 4 He sanctifies sabbaths to sanctify the unclean,
and He confines the day to gather the wandering.
In the binding of sabbaths they are released to provoke to anger
that the idle might breathe [and] sin [and] provoke to anger.
Therefore our Lord abrogated the sabbath,
since their tongue was bound by dispute
and their idleness was released for work.
- 5 Let the sinner give thanks—the unclean woman, who was not
ashamed
to enter the banquet of the pure and holy.⁵⁵⁴
With what boldness she made her way through the crowd [and]
entered.
Instead of wine, love intoxicated her, the friend of wine.⁵⁵⁵

549. Ephrem puns here on "Zacchaeus," *zky*, and "conquered," *zk'*.

550. Zacchaeus climbed a sycamore, Syriac *i'nt' pkyht'*, not a fig tree, simply *i'nt'*. Ephrem takes advantage of the similarity to evoke other associations; cf. Mark 11.12–14 et par. Here, too, he alludes to the notion that Adam and Eve were received hospitably by the fig tree, found elsewhere in Ephrem as well as in some rabbinic traditions; cf. *Cruc.* 5.15 and *Kronholm, Motifs*, 219.

551. Cf. Mark 11.1–10 et par.

552. Cf. John 9, esp. 9.6–7.

553. Cf. John 9.16ff.

554. Cf. Luke 7.36–50 et par.

555. On sober inebriation, cf. *Virg.* 24.7 and note ad loc., also *Virg.* 31.13, 37.3.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- For each one who has put on the love of the Most High,
who is girt with the armor that is unforged,
despises the sword that has been forged.
- 6 By her hair she took a blessing from His sweat.
The impurity from Your body cleansed her mind.
And she who had been made an occasion of death for everyone
became an occasion of repentance for sinners.
The unclean who saw her glorified You,
and sinners saw her and praised You,
and the holy wondered at her and crowned You [with praise].
- 7 Her adornments and her plaits that had caused onlookers to sin
were a towel for You that wiped Your feet.⁵⁵⁶
Iskariot whom You washed, wronged Your towel.⁵⁵⁷
By that thing by which she was lost, she was found, since she
believed,
so that triumphant was the oil that had condemned her,
and sanctified was her mouth that had defiled her,
and purified was her beauty that had debased her.
- 8 Let Mary give thanks to you, the chaste one who was not ashamed
to enter the glorious, resplendent and sanctified banquet.⁵⁵⁸
Without embarrassment let us approach the fearful one without fear.
People who fear are proud, but God is plain to all.
It is good that we have a King who is not fearful,
and the Son of the King Who is mingled but not proud,
and a Judge who chastises but is not angry.
- 9 Let Martha thank You. Let her bring a crown to You—
and the sister who did not serve and the brother, all three.⁵⁵⁹
Together they have crowned you with one . . . crown of siblings,
. . . he lifted up to the head . . .
By her service Martha became famous;⁵⁶⁰
Mary You made famous by her love;⁵⁶¹
and Lazarus because of his resurrection.⁵⁶²

556. Cf. Luke 7.38.

557. Cf. John 13.1–30.

558. Here Luke 7.36–50 is conflated with John 12, thanks to John 11.2.

559. Cf. John 12.2.

560. Cf. Luke 10.38–42.

561. Cf. Matt. 26.13 and Luke 7.47.

562. Cf. John 11, esp. 45–53.

HYMN 35

- 10 Let the Mount, the Mount of Olives, give thanks to Him Who sat
on it,
and the disciples who simply asked Him there.⁵⁶³
In the furnace of truth He purified the question
from the filth of controversy and the strife of the scribes.
The question and the answer He weighed and gave.⁵⁶⁴
The stones neither outweighed nor were outweighed,
so that mouths would neither harm nor be harmed.
- 11 "With the branches of my children I give thanks that you made me
a new way for You, made smooth by cloaks.⁵⁶⁵
And that a colt was fitting for you to ride, I remember.
Instead of elders who deny You glory and do not cry out,
let the horn summon, my Lord, the dead.
Let the elders glorify you at last
when they have seen the stones crying out."⁵⁶⁶
- 12 The former priests desired your beauty but did not see [it]⁵⁶⁷
The middle priests hated your beauty and displeased you.
The priests of the churches grasp you in their hands,
the Bread of life that came down and was mingled with the
senses.⁵⁶⁸
Because they hated You, hateful are Your persecutors,
but Your lovers are handsome because they earnestly desire You,
and Your heirs are rich because they acquire you.
- 13 The land that hated You is worthy of curses,
and the city that crucified You, as Sodom was its habitation,
the holy town in which an owl hoots.
Zion has her barrenness, but Your church has her fruitfulness
by the trumpet of your peace that resounds in her
and the kithara of Moses that is played by her
and the harp of David that is played by her.⁵⁶⁹

563. Mark 13.3–4 et par.

564. Cf. Mark 13, esp. 5–37, et par.

565. Cf. Mark 11.1–10 et par. The common notion that children waved the palm branches is based in a conflation of Matt. 21.14–17 with the entry into the city in Matt. 21.1–11. The speaker is the Mount of Olives.

566. Cf. Luke 19.40.

567. For the idea that the righteous of the Old Testament were awaiting Christ, cf. Nat. 1.12f. and 20–60.

568. Cf. Nat. 22.14.

569. The postscript reads, "Completed is one hymn on Jericho."

36

In this hymn Ephrem vividly evokes, sometimes through personification, ■ sequence of places associated with the passion, resurrection and ascension of Jesus: the Upper Room (str. 1), Gethsemane (str. 2), Golgotha (str. 3), Emmaus (str. 4), the Lake of Tiberias (str. 5–8), and the Mount of Olives (str. 9–10). Like some of the earlier hymns of this collection, this hymn may have some relation to the development of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the fourth century. Alternatively, it may be seen as commentary on a continuous gospel account, drawing especially on materials from Luke and John. Since this hymn, with the other hymns in this group on the same melody, emphasizes ascension themes, they may even have been written for an early ascension liturgy.⁵⁷⁰ In any case, the hymn ends on a stirring eschatological note.

36

The fifth on the same melody

- 1 In the mouth of my just ones I give thanks that He broke in me
that Living Bread that was broken for His disciples,
and I remember that in the basin of water they have been washed.
Instead of the Twelve for whom He stood and became a servant
are myriads of Watchers who will stand
before His throne at the End.
Judas they will menace [saying] how much he disbelieved.⁵⁷¹

570. This feast entered the Western liturgical calendar from Jerusalem through fourth-century pilgrims like Egeria; cf. *Egeria: Diary of a Pilgrimage*, trans. and annotated by George E. Gingras, ACW 38 (New York, 1970), ch. 42, pp. 117f., 244f. The combination of themes in the present hymns seems to indicate ■ similar sequence in the Syriac-speaking environment.

571. The angels form a sort of chorus, commenting on the drama of salvation, cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 148–52.

HYMN 36

*Refrain: Glory to the mercy that sent You to us to give us Your body, a living
sacrifice!*

- 2 Let the place in which He sweated [blood] offer Him a crown.
Let His sweat⁵⁷² in disputation make the doubter sweat.
For, although everyone sweats to a degree,
the one whom He slayed without measure sweated without
measure.
... put on
... that at the right moment
... sweat of toil ...
- 3 To You again Golgotha gives thanks that she was made equal
to that great mountain that was erected higher than her,⁵⁷³
and she is waiting for Your great procession to be consoled,
to see You, the Judge of all, on the terrible judgment-seat,
and the crucifiers hanging⁵⁷⁴ for vengeance,
and Caiaphas⁵⁷⁵ standing in disgrace,
and the thief dwelling in the Garden.⁵⁷⁶
- 4 Let a town⁵⁷⁷ so give thanks to You, a traveler who entered and fled.
You deceived Cleophas in order to educate by Your explanation,
that you might not alarm the weak children by Your resurrection.
To make them perfect, My Lord, you tore the veil with the bread.⁵⁷⁸
Your brightness will be revealed completely at the End
when the veil will be lifted from all,
so that the crucifiers may see that it is You.
- 5 Three trophies were arranged in a mystery:
bread, fish and inextinguishable fire.⁵⁷⁹
It was not the bread baked by the sweat of the house of Adam.
Who, indeed, has ever had a table set out of Himself:

572. Ephrem puns on place, *dwkt'*, and sweat, *dw't'*.

573. Mount Sinai. With clear allusion to a Moses-Christ typology, Ephrem plays on the relative heights of Mount Sinai and Golgotha, a little hill outside the city of Jerusalem. Here, too, he puns on the root, *zqp*, here meaning "to erect" but most often meaning "to crucify."

574. Or "crucified," Syriac *tl'*.

575. The high priest is named only in Matthew and in John, cf. Mt. 26.57, and John 18.24.

576. Luke 23.43.

577. The reference to Cleophas in the next line indicates that the town is Emmaus, cf. Luke 24.13-35.

578. Luke 24.30f.

579. John 21.9, though there is only one fish here according to both the Greek and the Peshitta.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- Fish caught without water,⁵⁸⁰
 Bread baked without hands,⁵⁸¹
 Coals heaped up without sticks?
- 6 The Lord of the flock who ate⁵⁸² with the disciples,
 took and entrusted His flock to Simon who hears Him.⁵⁸³
 He repeated the command three times to increase the admonition.
 Three pledges he took from the shepherd
 that with love⁵⁸⁴ he would tend His lambs
 and care for His sheep with affection
 [and] keep His ewes with respect.
- 7 They saw that they were weak, needy, small and ignorant
 and the land was full of learned men⁵⁸⁵ and rulers.
 Behold, by the fire and the fish and the bread He persuaded them.
 By the revealed banquet He revealed the future [banquet]—
 He Who heaped up abundance without work,
 that Teacher of the Gentiles without money
 by ignorant men, the vessels of His wisdom.
- 8 A gesture and a command served Him Who commands all,
 and the rich will rules over all treasures.
 It took abundance and heaped it up before the All-sustainer.
 This banquet was pure, brief and suitable
 for our God Who ate without being hungry,
 Who ate salt⁵⁸⁶ with humans⁵⁸⁷ in His affection
 that we might remain in His truth and love.
- 9 They accompanied Lazarus who departed into the grave.

580. On Christ and the apostles as fishermen, cf. Nat. 4.35, Virg. 32.8 and notes ad loc. The fish is a Christological and eucharistic symbol in the inscription of Aberkios; cf. Introduction n. 12, above.

581. The later notion of icons made without hands is foreshadowed in the present allusion to the eucharistic bread; further, cf. McVey, *Microcosm*, 100f.

582. Literally "to eat salt," hence to be a companion; cf. John 21.15–17.

583. A pun on the name, Simon, *šm'wn*, and "to hear, obey," *šm'.*

584. Syriac, *ḥwb'*, as opposed to *rhmi'*, translated "affection" in the next line.

585. Or scribes.

586. As above in stanza 6.1.

587. The Syriac is singular.

HYMN 36

The Great One departed for the height, and the Galileans⁵⁸⁸
accompanied Him.

[He is] far and near and hidden in His revealing.

Lazarus died and revived and mingled and sat down to eat.

Our Lord descended to Sheol and returned.

He ascended to His heavens and behold He is mingled with the
lower [world].

Again He mingles with [and] has those who love Him sit down to
eat.

10 "More than all who rejoice, I⁵⁸⁹ rejoice to have seen Him
Who has made my lands rejoice and has been lifted up. I escorted
Him,

and I am going to hear His living voice

when He calls the dead, as He called our dead, 'Come out!'⁵⁹⁰

They will all answer Him and emerge,

and not a bone will remain in Sheol

where [as yet] Lazarus alone has answered Him."⁵⁹¹

588. Possibly instead of "Galileans," *glyly*, the text should read *gygl'*, "Wheels," the group of angels associated especially with ascension, along with the Cherubim. Although they are not well-known in Christian literature, they are mentioned in a similar context by Ephrem himself; cf. CJ 3.17, where he also puns on the two words, and Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 73–75.

589. The speaker is the Mount of Olives, personified.

590. Cf. John 11.43.

591. The postscript reads, "Completed is one hymn on the church."

Ephrem's basic concern in this hymn is soteriological. The serpent, Satan, who had conquered humans and caused them to age and die, was himself conquered by Christ (str. 1). Through the incarnation and the Eucharist, human nature has been recreated by the infusion of Christ's body (str. 2). To ailing human nature he came as a physician with three medicines: bread, wine and chrism (str. 3). By giving his own body to death, the destroyer of human bodies, Christ both sated and destroyed death itself (str. 5). On behalf of the soul, who by free will had stained her garment, the body with sins, Christ washed that garment in his blood (str. 6). Contrary to both the Jewish and the Marcionite views, Jesus completed the Jewish scripture and restored the work of the Creator in the incarnation and salvation (str. 7–8). Even his perfect body, ascended into heaven, has the same nature as ours (str. 9). In the final strophe, an important witness to Ephrem's Christian upbringing, he explicitly sets his orthodox Christian faith over against Judaism, idolatry and heresy.

37

The seventh on the same melody

- 1 The serpent wounded Eve⁵⁹² and she became old;⁵⁹³ he rebelled
 against all—
 against kings and priests,⁵⁹⁴ prophets and saviors.
 The Root of Isaiah wearied the dragon.⁵⁹⁵
 By the early Root from Mary he was conquered,

592. Ephrem probably chooses to mention Eve rather than Adam here for the sake of the pun on "Eve" and "serpent"—*ḥw'* and *ḥwy'*.

593. Beck takes the serpent as subject of this verb, but his text indicates that the reading of these first few words is uncertain. Eve as subject makes better sense, cf. Nat. 7.11.

594. Pagan priests, *kwmr'*, rather than Jewish priests, but cf. Nat. 9.3 and Virg. 32.2.

595. Isa. 11.10; further on the "dragon," cf. Nat. 8.3 and note ad loc.

HYMN 37

- Prayer murmured, and he was enfeebled.
 The Signet⁵⁹⁶ blew on him and dried him up
 Adam's bones leapt for joy in Sheol.
- 2 His body was newly mixed with our bodies,
 and His pure blood has been poured out into our veins,
 and His voice into our ears, and His brightness⁵⁹⁷ into our eyes.
 All of Him has been mixed into all of us by His compassion,
 and since He loves His church very much,
 He did not give her the manna of her rival.⁵⁹⁸
 He had living bread for her to eat.⁵⁹⁹
- 3 Wheat, the olive and grapes, created for our use—
 the three of them serve You symbolically in three ways.
 With three medicines You healed our disease.
 Humankind had become weak and sorrowful and was failing.
 You strengthened her with Your blessed bread,
 and You consoled her with Your sober wine,
 and You made her joyful with Your holy chrism.
- 4 The sheep and also the ewe, who were created for our use—
 a cloak from the wool of sheep He wore . . .
 Instead of . . . His four symbols . . .
 Behold the Source . . . from the hem of Whose garment⁶⁰⁰
 . . . our help . . .
 And [to] each one according to the capacity of his understanding⁶⁰¹
 Your spring gives without jealousy.
- 5 The body thanks You that it was saved by Your abasement—
 the sheep that had strayed, while the lion lay in ambush to
 dismember it:
 sin in secret is a wild animal that tears it to pieces.⁶⁰²
 David preserved himself while he saved the lamb.⁶⁰³
 Instead of our body You gave Your body

596. Syriac *h̄tm'*, cf. Nat. 1.99, 12.3, 28.7, Virg. 20.12, 31.12, and notes ad loc.

597. Or "manifestation, epiphany," Syriac *dn̄h'*.

598. A rival wife in a polygamous society. Israel is, of course, meant. The word here, '*rt*', provides a pun with '*dt*', church.

599. John 6.35.

600. Cf. Mark 5.25–34, 6.56 et par.

601. Cf. Nat. 4.197–200, Virg. 22.21, 23.3.

602. Sin "in secret," Syriac *bksy'*, could mean either "secret sin" or that in a symbolic sense sin is a wild animal.

603. Cf. 1 Sam. 17.34–37, and Nat. 7.8.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- to that Death that consumed us but was not sated.
By You alone it was sated and burst.
- 6 Let the soul thank You—that filthy thing that You wiped clean
of the stains of debts she incurred by her freedom.⁶⁰⁴
For her whose will wove her a stained garment,
the Merciful One wove a garment of light, and He clothed her.
Whereas priests cleansed with a bird at daybreak,⁶⁰⁵
You cleansed the soul that had acted foolishly.
You bathed it in Your blood, bleached [it] and made it gleam.⁶⁰⁶
- 7 With the scribes our Lord debated.
Clothed in their scripture, He cast [them] down in controversy.
With the breastplate of truth, the psalms, He was girded.
He questioned them and was questioned, and victorious was He
Whose shield [was] the Torah
and Isaiah His sword and spear
and the prophets the arrows for His bow.⁶⁰⁷
- 8 His names silently renounce the Stranger,⁶⁰⁸
for Jesus is Messiah and our Lord and our God.
From the full treasures of the Creator He stole [and] became rich.
Justice He stretched out like a bow in the Temple:
He shot fearful warnings at the scribes.
He shot an arrow at a demon and silenced him,⁶⁰⁹
and another at a legion and punished it.⁶¹⁰
- 9 The body from Mary rebuked that one who said
that with another body the Heavenly One dwelled in her.
Perfect is the body, but how did it grow with our bread?
It has sweat and spit and tears and even blood.
And if the ascended body is unsullied,
still it resembles our body since it died.

604. Cf. Beck, *Reden*, 89–91.

605. Cf. Lev. 14.1–7.

606. Not only the crucifixion but also Christian baptism are the means of this superior priestly cleansing, cf. Saber, *Theologie*, 46, 108, 123.

607. Cf. Virg. 14.4–5, 10–11, 13–14.

608. Marcion's name for the True God as opposed to the false deity of the Jewish scripture.

609. Cf. Mark 1.23–26 et par.

610. Cf. Mark 5.1–20 et par.

HYMN 37

Renounce [error] and confess that their nature is one.⁶¹¹

10 Your truth [was] in my youth; Your verity [is] in my old age.

I rejected and expelled the party of the crucifiers;

I scorned graven images and the metal of strange [gods]
and the new fraud that would be contrived to deceive us.

The old and new [frauds] I deny, my Lord;

by the Old and New [Testaments] that I have believed

I have taken the measure of my hymns.⁶¹²

611. That is, renounce the heresy of Marcionism and confess that the nature of Christ's body and ours is the same. This translation differs significantly from Beck's. For a similar anti-Marcionite polemic concerning the unity of the created and resurrected human nature, cf. Nat. 17.18.

612. The postscript adds, "Completed is one hymn on the faith."

Here Ephrem seems to be looking for a suitable explanation of the behavior of Lot and his daughters. He excuses Lot on the grounds that he needed consolation and the daughters on the grounds that they thought they must be the only people left on earth after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Ephrem's explanation of the daughters' behavior is found also in Jewish haggadic traditions.⁶¹³

38

The same melody as "God Whom you [men] loved"

- 1 O Lot's daughters, who made the simple man drink a foul drink.⁶¹⁴
They gave [it] for marriage, but he drank for consolation.

Refrain: To You be glory, Judge of all!

- 2 He drank to assuage his sorrow and by the wine to forget his terror.
By the wine he summoned sleep, since sleep fled from fear.
3 He drank to forget the terror of the devastating lightning bolts that
consumed [Sodom and Gomorrah].
He became drunk to make pass away from his heart the avenging
thunderclaps.
4 He drank to settle his heart that the sound of horrors had uprooted.
His ears suffered, and his heart raved with the bellowing [from]
Sodom.
5 Broken was the heart of his daughters since voices were confused
with voices,
mouths bellowed from the depth, roars and thunderclaps from the
height.

613. Cf. Ginzberg, *Legends*, V, 243, n. 188, and idem. *Haggada*, 110f.

614. Cf. Gen. 19.30-38.

HYMN 38

- 6 Even this earth bellowed since the wrath [of God] can make it
bellow.
The four cities that burned suddenly gave one bellow.
- 7 Grace restrained the foolish girls,
and if [it had] not, who would be able to live with those sounds?
- 8 Even the sea bellowed there . . . became a deaf-mute . . .
. . . wrath of the Divinity . . . the sea and the land.
- 9 The sounds made the foolish girls think the entire creation was
perishing
since the smoke spread and did not allow them to see.
- 10 A fog spread there and gave no opportunity for the eye.
[Only] at a short distance was one able to see anything.
- 11 The outsider could enter from [outside] the fumes and the fog.
Lot could not go out; he was afraid to leave his house of refuge.
- 12 From all these things, they surmised the entire creation had
perished.
The old man was alarmed, being an old man, and the foolish girls,
[too], being girls.
- 13 But if the old man was terrified, how much indeed would youth
fear!
He saw that his daughters were alarmed and that his wife had
become a pillar [of salt].⁶¹⁵
- 14 The old man and his daughters thought the wine would console
[them]
and make them forget the terrors that surrounded them on all sides.
- 15 The foolish girls went out from the inhabited earth; the desert
mocked them.
. . . that mocked very much, and the desert asked the inhabited
earth . . .
- 16 They thought⁶¹⁶ . . .
- 17 . . . Wine consoles old age; conception consoles youth.⁶¹⁷

615. Gen. 19.26.

616. The remainder of this strophe and much of the following one is illegible.

617. A postscript reads, "Completed is one hymn on Lot and his daughters."

39

This hymn is an alphabetical acrostic, using the letters of the first half of the alphabet. Instructions for the melody are illegible. Despite the fragmentary state of the text, some themes may be discerned. The coming of Christ has freed us to work (str. 1). When we were without hope beyond death, God planted truth, love and hope in our hearts, minds and souls, the promise of eternal life and the way to attain it (str. 11–12). Like a shipwrecked sailor, Adam could not rise from the depths, even with the help of angels and prophets, until Jesus came to conquer the evil one and to bring grace (str. 2, 7, 15, 16).

39

- '1 I shall confess that I am freed, and ask to be enriched.
I shall work to earn wages, and scatter seed to be fully supplied.
For our Lord came down and gave silver for merchants
and seed for farmers, truth for preachers
and ears for hearers.

Refrain: Praise to Him Who sent You to enrich us by Your coming!

- '2 Ships of souls in the waves of evils!
Lost treasures in the sea of crimes!
You came down . . .
. . . it was suitable for their waves
. . . their paths.
[Strophes 3–6 are illegible.]

- 7 . . .
Who was exalted . . . they escaped from him.
You humbled the evil one in the contest.
Weakness conquered him; infirmity subdued him,

HYMN 39

for in You he was conquered by all.

[Strophes 8–10 are illegible.]

W 11 And since the inhabited earth had become a stem without fruits,
the Vine from Egypt brought forth early . . . ⁶¹⁸

You came down and planted Your truth in our heart,
Your love in our mind, Your affection in our generation
and Your hope in our souls.

Z 12 Everyone was preparing provisions for Gehenna.

Everyone was providing an abundance for loss.

You came down and became the Guide to the House of life,
the Way to discipline, the smooth [Way] to the kingdom,
and the Gate of entry.

H 13 Wine . . . was . . .

. . . tastes.

You . . . and You were . . . all.

and truth made all wise, and the thread . . . all,
and the goal . . . all.

T 14 . . .

Falsehood . . . fruit.

You came down [and] reproved . . . in Your furnace

. . . by Your mortality

and death by Your life.

T 15 Adam had sunken down. Spiritual angels came down

to help, but he did not come up. Prophets [came], but he did not
rise.

By You he who had sunken like iron turned and came up.

You made the heavy one fly, and You sank the light one

like iron and wood. ⁶¹⁹

Y 16 O Jesus, for Whose exploits the mouth does not suffice,
nor the voice for His helps, nor a measure for His abundance,
to Your Father in You be glory, for You came down from His
[place]

and went up from ours. His grace came down to us in You,
and glory goes up by means of You.

Y 17 It is fitting . . . my Lord for a handful of Your worshippers,

⁶¹⁸. Cf. Ps. 80.8f.

⁶¹⁹. Cf. Virg. 11.4 and Saber, *Theologie*, 120f.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

. . . His guide . . . in wombs . . .
. . . ■ wonder . . . His smallness
. . . in the desert . . . a storehouse from this
Guide of our learning.⁶²⁰

620. A postscript reads, "Completed is one hymn of thanksgiving."

Although this hymn completes the alphabetical acrostic started in the previous hymn, its themes are different. The emphasis on truth against error and peace against contentiousness identifies it as an anti-Arian work. Whereas the righteous people of old yearned for the Messiah, we, who have received his benefits, are ungrateful and contentious (str. 1–3) The synoptic parable of the talents, loosely recalled, provides illustrations for these faults (str. 4–6). Truth is more important than fasting, as even the martyrs illustrate (str. 7). The story of the tower of Babel is interpreted as a lesson against contentiousness rather than against pride (str. 11–12).

40

The same melody

- K 1 My Lord, in all ages the righteous hunger for Your coming.⁶²¹
 They all lie down and go to sleep thirsting for Your revelation.
 You come down and made their great remembrance,
 for You revealed their desire and showed their longing
 to rebuke our satiety.

Refrain: Blessed is He for Whom the righteous long!

- L 2 We are led [to wonder] at them and at us: How much the people of
 old hungered;
 they departed without murmuring; they praised, lay down and
 were silent.
 You came down and opened Your treasure for the poor,
 but, having become rich, they went astray, cheated and trampled
 the seals
 and treasures of the kingdom.⁶²²

621. Cf. John 8.56, Nat. 1.12f., 20–60, Virg. 35.12.

622. Cf. Matt. 7.6.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- M 3* From Your treasure-house they took the obols,⁶²³
and by them the just inherited talents of wealth.
You came down and gave silver to our poverty
and talents for our laxity, but we acquired debts⁶²⁴
from the treasures.
- N 4* Let us wonder at that first man who brought ten talents.⁶²⁵
His treasury was full of wealth, but his mouth was full of
silence.⁶²⁶
The wretched man . . .
. . . he said with You.
- S 5* He makes himself very distant from that first man
who worked, grew rich and was silent and fearful, although rich.
Blessed is he whom You praise!⁶²⁷ Stamped on us are the signs
of the wretched one who contended with You.⁶²⁸ His ingratitude is
in our mouth,
his dispute on our tongue.
- ' 6* The first one doubled his talents,⁶²⁹ but the lazy one doubled
the sounds of his complaints. A second Nabal,
found [to be] a son of David, the wretched one kept the silver.⁶³⁰
Let us wonder at the disputers⁶³¹ who do not even keep
the capital, faith, for her⁶³² Lord.
- P 7* The mouth of the confessors, my Lord, will be struck and will
confess.
[If] their tongue has been cut out, mutilated, it will sing His praise.
The mouth of the faithless eats and disputes, my Lord,
and drinks and contends again. It carries in sweet things
and takes out bitter things.
- § 8* Let our fasts be truth and our vigils also verity,
since fast and also vigil error defiles.
Since You came down to teach that food does not defile

623. Cf. Mark 7.42.

624. Or "sins."

625. Cf. Matt. 25.14–30 and Luke 19.11–27, but the details do not match the hymn.

626. But cf. Matt. 25.20, where he speaks.

627. Cf. Matt. 25.21,23.

628. Cf. Matt. 25.24f.

629. Matt. 25.16, but not Luke.

630. Cf. 1 Sam. 25.1–42.

631. That is, the Arians.

632. That is, faith's Lord.

HYMN 40

and drink does not make unclean; filth from the heart
makes a human being unclean.⁶³³

[Strophes 9, 10 are illegible.]

R 11 The High One came down [and] confused voices and tongues⁶³⁴
that were made capable of harm and He taught . . .
and He gave the disciples a multitude of tongues
that their verity might be as a type . . .

§ 12 . . .

Since He saw the confusion in His age for that people,
He destroyed the tower [of Babel] . . . for the disputers.
They divided . . . that truth might not be built—
[truth], the tower of our redemption.

T 13 Let Your justice give thanks by which was separated the straw
and the dust of learning, just as also chaff
is separated from wheat⁶³⁵ and the dregs from the clarified [wine].
Thus was separated . . . the true church
. . . false . . .
[The fourteenth strophe is illegible.]

633. Cf. Mark 7.14–23 et par., Matt. 15.10–20.

634. Cf. Gen. 11.1–9.

635. Cf. Matt. 13.30.

41

This short alphabetical acrostic is in the personal style of some of the Old Testament psalms, presuming boldly on God's grace and mercy. Notable themes are the portrayal of Christ as a bird and as a Levitical priest (str. 2).

41

To the melody, "Who will not stir up his mind?"

- ' 1 I shall ask with every mouth and take by every means.
I shall increase on every occasion and sing in every melody
glory in every song.

Refrain: Glory to the All-merciful!

- B 2 I give heed to Your mercy; in Your wings I take shelter.⁶³⁶
Of my foolish deeds I am ashamed; by You may my sins be blotted
out.
With Your hyssop, You cleanse all.⁶³⁷
- G 3 It is revealed that You are gentle; it is revealed that You are
merciful.
Revealed is Your goodness; hidden is Your majesty.
Perfected is Your favor.
- D 4 Miserable is our mind; it resembles a tree
that needs to be watered each day.
It is easy for us to profess You.
- H 5 Grant me what I ask. I have believed that I shall receive.
These things that were sought my senses were seeking.

636. For Christ portrayed as a bird, cf. Nat. 17.1, 26.13 and notes ad loc.

637. For hyssop, symbol of Christ's Levitical priesthood and his power to forgive sins, cf. Nat. 1.25, 9.3, Virg. 8.10 and 21, notes ad loc., and Saber, *Theologie*, 45–49.

HYMN 41

So Your mercy willed.

[Strophe 6 is illegible.]

Z 7 You purchased me to belong to You; justify me⁶³⁸ that I may give
You thanks.

It is the age when the pure will sing with their voices
divine songs.

638. The Syriac must be changed from *zkny* to *zkyny*. Beck's translation does not match his text, which gives the 3 sg. m. perfect rather than the imperative.

This is the first in a set of nine hymns on Jonah.⁶³⁹ After a brief statement of the story (str. 1–5), Ephrem begins a more imaginative meditation. The language of weather and agriculture (str. 6–9) quickly gives way to the language of childbirth (str. 10–28). Here Jonah's two conceptions are the center of attention: the first being a natural conception by his mother; the second an unnatural one by the whale. Since the faculty of speech or reason is what distinguishes humans from animals, Ephrem enjoys the paradox that a rational creature, Jonah's mother, conceived him as an irrational, speechless fetus, while an irrational animal, the whale, conceived him as a rational adult. A single strophe alludes to the Christological symbolism established in the gospels, which is central to Ephrem's own poetry (str. 29). This is followed by consideration of Jonah's priestly qualities (str. 30–33).

42

ON JONAH AND NINEVEH

- 1 Jonah hired a ship and went down [to sea].⁶⁴⁰
With silver he bought a watery drowning.
- 2 A bare voice entered Nineveh.
A hundred thousand souls were engaged in business there.⁶⁴¹
- 3 The naked voice that sowed—
its harvest [was] a hundred-twenty-thousandfold.

639. Although he presents the texts as if there were nine hymns, Beck argues convincingly that the last four (Virg. 47–48 and 49–50) are actually two hymns split in half. Hence there are actually only seven hymns in this set, cf. CSCO 223, vii. I have followed the numbering of Beck's text here, so it appears here as if there are nine hymns, Virg. 42–50.

640. Jon. 1.3.

641. Cf. Jon. 4.11.

HYMN 42

- 4 On the boat human mouths tore him in pieces.⁶⁴²
 In the deep the whale's mouth swallowed him up.⁶⁴³
- 5 In Nineveh that He healed, thousands without limit
 poured upon Him all praises.
- 6 By means of one good man He healed them,
 and the cloud of mouths poured forth His glory.
- 7 Therefore twenty-two myriads of mouths
 from below to above rained glory.
- 8 The boughs that have been exposed to hail⁶⁴⁴ are bereft and ugly,
 since the hail has stripped the leaves and fruits.
- 9 By the hail of his sayings Jonah beat down [Nineveh],
 and her boughs shed [their] splendid fruits.
- 10 By the birthpangs of his sayings⁶⁴⁵ he hastened the community
 of Nineveh to bring forth voices of glory.
- 11 Instead of ■ living creature the prophet generated
 the barren one [Nineveh] who brought forth fruits of glory.
- 12 A whale in the sea swallowed him too.
 It conceived and brought him forth instead of females.
- 13 In the sea it conceived him; on land it brought him forth.
 It delivered him to the all-suckling land.
- 14 He was conceived and born as in nature,
 once more conceived and born unnaturally.
- 15 A woman conceived as usual,
 and in addition she brought forth as in nature.
- 16 A fish conceived him unnaturally,
 and in addition he brought him forth not in the usual way.
- 17 When ■ woman endowed with speech⁶⁴⁶ conceived him,
 he took his beginning in her as a speechless one.
- 18 But again when a speechless whale conceived him,
 inside him [the whale] had an advocate endowed with speech.
- 19 When a woman on land conceived him,
 he was not aware of her prayers.

642. Cf. Jon. 1.8–11.

643. Jon. 1.17.

644. The Syriac *'tbrd* must be a denominative verb formed from *brd'*, "hail."

645. In this and the following strophe substantial changes in word order are necessary to attain a smooth English translation.

646. Or "rational."

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 20 But when the fish in the sea had conceived him,
the fish was not aware of his prayers!
- 21 But when he was conceived within a human woman
he resembled an animal that was speechless.
- 22 An animal conceived him in the womb of the sea;
that silent one became endowed with speech.
- 23 Within one endowed with speech he was quiet;
within a silent one he became endowed with speech.
- 24 The womb on land brought forth in months.
The womb in the sea brought him forth in days.
- 25 When his mother brought him forth, he grew;
She swore a vow for her infant.
- 26 When the fish brought him forth in the sea,
the infant in the womb swore a vow.
- 27 Who has seen an infant in the womb
that swore a vow upon his birth?
- 28 Who has seen an infant that becomes a fetus?
Who has seen a fetus delivered from the mouth?
- 29 The servant bore the symbols of his Lord
in his conception and his birth and in his raising to life.⁶⁴⁷
- 30 Who has seen a priest in a fish
who offered a prayer to his God?
- 31 A pure temple the fish became for him,
and the mouth of Jonah [became] a censer.
- 32 The smell of incense rose up from within the abyss
to the High One Who sits in the highest heaven.
- 33 His Savior came down; He became the key of the mouth.
Silence delivered the Herald of words.

647. Cf. Matt. 12.38-41 and Luke 11.29-32.

43

In this hymn Peter is contrasted with Jonah (str. 1–2). Unlike Jonah, the reluctant prophet sent to the Gentiles, he went willingly to be their apostle. He, rather than Paul, is here portrayed as the apostle to the Gentiles. Although this might be due to some remaining aversion to Paul, traceable to early Jewish Christianity in this area, it is more probably for the sake of Ephrem’s extensive use of the image of Peter as a fisherman. The main theme here is the contrast between Peter’s acceptance when he caught fish for their death and his censure when he caught sinners for life (esp. 3–15). Finally, the theme is brought to cosmic dimensions as a contrast between death and the Living One (str. 16–17).

43

The same melody

- 1 Simon rejoiced when he cast his net
and gathered in it living fish for death.
- 2 Jonah was distressed when he cast his net
and gathered in it thousands of dead [people] for life.
- 3 Simon obeyed the One Who said to him,
“You have caught for death, [now] make disciples for life.”⁶⁴⁸
- 4 O the one who caught fish to be consumed,
come catch the peoples lest they be consumed!
[Strophe 5 is illegible.]
- 6 [Simon] put to death the living and brought to life the dead.
He was loved when he put to death; he was hated when he brought
to life.

648. Cf. Mark 1.17 and Matt. 4.19. For the same contrast with regard to all the apostles, cf. Virg. 32.8.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 7 Although he was catching fish for death,
when he caught abundantly, he was praised.
8 But although he was catching people⁶⁴⁹ for life,
when he caught abundantly he was insulted.
9 In that [time] when he brought to life, he was a helper,
but in the [time] when he put to death, he was not harmful.
10 For this belongs to the existence of fish,
that after life they arrive at death.
11 But [it belongs] to the existence of sinners,
that after death they return to life.
12 Indeed he caught and gave fish for food,
but he delivered the peoples from the Devourer.⁶⁵⁰
14 His net made human mouths rejoice;
His gospel made the mouth of death mourn.
14 What was given for food fed its eater.
What was not given for food tore apart its Devourer.
15 He held his net so it would confine the fish.⁶⁵¹
He tore apart sin that swallowed the peoples.
16 Death brought up to the land
fish that lived in the belly of the sea.
17 The Living One raised up to the height
the peoples who were dead in the belly of sin.
18 By the catching of fish hunger decreased.
By the catching of the peoples . . .
[Strophes 19, 20, 21 are illegible.]

649. The Syriac is singular, "son of man," meaning human being.

650. Death. Ephrem puns here on food ('*wkl*') and Devourer or eater ('*kwl*').

651. Cf. Luke 5.6 and Matt. 4.21.

In this hymn Jonah is contrasted with Abraham and Moses, always to his disadvantage. In both cases the invidious comparison is taken as typical of Jews and Gentiles as well. Whereas Abraham prayed for mercy for the city of Sodom, Jonah prayed for the punishment of Nineveh (str. 1–2). Ephrem claims this is typical of the circumcised, who expect to be chosen purely for their name, whereas the uncircumcised, such as the Gentiles of Nineveh did the deeds of repentance (str. 3–14). Likewise Moses is better than Jonah since he was a righteous man struggling with an unruly congregation (str. 15). Jonah's complaint, on the other hand, is that the people listened to him (str. 16). Again, Ephrem takes this behavior as typical of "inward" vs. "outward" circumcision (str. 17–20). The names of individuals and groups are less important than their deeds, as Cain, Abel and the Assyrians demonstrate (str. 21–23).

44

The same melody

- 1 That Sodom not be overthrown Abraham prayed.⁶⁵²
That Nineveh be overthrown Jonah hoped.⁶⁵³
- 2 That man prayed for [a city that] abused Watchers.⁶⁵⁴
This man was angry at [a city that] made the Watchers rejoice.⁶⁵⁵
- 3 Although I sent you,⁶⁵⁶ you have not gone from me.
When you preached, they ran [and] believed in you.⁶⁵⁷

652. Cf. Gen. 18.22–33.

653. Cf. Jon. 4.1–5.

654. Cf. Gen. 19.1–11.

655. Cf. Cramer, *Engelvorstellungen*, 148–52.

656. Christ, as Logos and thus the Divine Presence in the Old Testament, speaks to Jonah.

657. Cf. Jon. 3.1–9.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 4 You who are downtrodden broke the yoke,
but those rebels rush to the yoke.
- 5 You, son of the People who showed [what] your people [is],
but the peoples showed this of their brothers.
- 6 Discernment showed you [were one] of the circumcised,
but they showed the acceptableness of the uncircumcised.
- 7 Although you are quite suitable by virtue of your lineage,⁶⁵⁸
and although they are rejected,⁶⁵⁹ their election is in them.
- 8 I chose the circumcised, but they have rejected themselves.
I rejected the uncircumcised, but they have dedicated themselves.
- 9 Election, therefore, is not [a matter] of names,
for deeds enter and dismiss the names.
- 10 The furnace of testing of the name is the deed.
In it is tested whether it is the true name.
- 11 For there is fruit that is very splendid,
but its taste is the opposite of its beauty.
- 12 Even the despicability of the bee,
the most despised of all, is a spring of sweetness.
- 13 Splendid names—the house of the Hebrews—
are sweet names that make bitter things flow.
- 14 The mention of their name is sweet to the ear.
The taste of their fruit ravages your mouth.
- 15 Moses who sweetened the water with wood—⁶⁶⁰
his congregation was made bitter by the molten calf.⁶⁶¹
- 16 And you, who by your flight made the sea bitter,⁶⁶²
sweetened Nineveh by the sound of your trumpet.⁶⁶³
- 17 He whose body is circumcised but whose heart is uncircumcised
is circumcised outwardly but uncircumcised in secret.
- 18 But he whose heart is circumcised but whose flesh is uncircumcised
is circumcised for the Spirit but uncircumcised for the eye.
- 19 In the name of his circumcision the circumcised fornicates.
With the cup of his purity he drinks mire.

658. Literally, "you in whom is your lineage."

659. Probably due to a misprint, Beck's text lacks the *seyame* to indicate this is the Afel pl. masc. participle.

660. Cf. Exod. 17. 1–7.

661. Cf. Exod. 30.

662. Cf. Jon. 1. 4.

663. Cf. Jon. 3. 3–10.

HYMN 44

- 20 By a circumcised heart the uncircumcised becomes holy.⁶⁶⁴
In the bridal chamber of his heart dwells his Creator.
- 21 It was not his name [that] made Abel fair.
Because he desired innocence, his name was desirable.⁶⁶⁵
- 22 Eve chose the name of Cain,
but since he hated his brother, his name was hated by all,
- 23 The Assyrians! Inflammatory names!
They gave fruits of desirable tastes!⁶⁶⁶

664. Or "chaste."

665. On Cain and Abel here and in the following strophe, cf. Kronholm, *Motifs*, 220.

666. Cf. *Nat.* 19.3–6.

Here Ephrem dwells on a series of paradoxes. First, rather than willing the destruction of the repentant people of Nineveh, Jonah ought first to look for the destruction of the disobedient Jewish people (str. 1–9). Next, playing on ideas of awakening and calming, he presents a series of images to show that Jonah aroused when he should have assuaged and vice versa (str. 10–16). This leads to the next paradox, swallowing and disgorging (str. 17–22). Finally, the lot cast against Jonah tended toward death, while the sackcloth of the Ninevites led them toward life (str. 23–31).

45

The same melody

- 1 O son of Mattai,⁶⁶⁷ how has the city of Nineveh
offended you that you awaited its dying?
- 2 If you are a zealous man, go uproot first
the city that I made pleasant, that gave withered [fruits].⁶⁶⁸
- 3 But if you are merciful with the faithless,
why is your anger poured out upon penitents?
- 4 The vine as a bride I led out from Egypt.⁶⁶⁹
Instead of blossoms she bore sins.
- 5 Nineveh as clusters [of grapes] bore fasts
and as bunches [of grapes] all just deeds.⁶⁷⁰
- 6 Instead of clusters arrayed in leaves
her children put on sackcloth.
- 7 And instead of watering that makes fruits flourish
milk was withheld from the mouths of her children.

667. Cf. Jon. 1.1, Pes.

668. Cf. Isa. 5.1–7.

669. Ps. 80.8.

670. On the vineyard imagery, cf. Virg. 31.13 and note ad loc.

HYMN 45

- 8 The swine that loved the calf
ate the vine of Jacob under its shade.⁶⁷¹
- 9 Nineveh that acquired graven images by Error
overthrew her idols lest she be overthrown.
- 10 He sent him to land; he fled to sea.
He sent him to Nineveh; he boarded a ship.
- 11 To Nineveh He sent him to awaken the peoples.
He slept on the ship; the peoples awakened him!⁶⁷²
- 12 Instead of assuaging the sins of land
he went to awaken the waves on the sea.
- 13 He abandoned silencing the iniquity of the city.
He went to stir up a storm of the sea.
- 14 Instead of sanctifying the wicked city
he went to overturn a ship of the sea.
- 15 [Instead of] keeping watch on land and putting wickedness to sleep
he went to sleep at sea and awakened the water.
- 16 One who was quiet on the ship made the water cry out.
One who cried out on land silenced wickedness.
- 17 A fish swallowed him who had not gone to set free
the city that the greedy mouth⁶⁷³ swallowed.
- 18 The visible mouth disgorged him.
The hidden mouth disgorged the city.
- 19 Disgorged, the swallowed one became a preacher
to the city that swallowed him on land and disgorged him.⁶⁷⁴
- 20 When he fell into the sea, he sated the fish.
When he preached on land, he annihilated the greedy one.
- 21 On the ship they asked him, "Who are you and whose?"⁶⁷⁵
In Nineveh they believed him without questioning.
- 22 On the ship all the sailors buried him [in the sea].
In Nineveh all the sinners healed him.
- 23 By his entering the ship the lots⁶⁷⁶ fell on it.
By his entering Nineveh sackcloth spread on it.

671. Cf. Ps. 80.13.

672. Cf. Jon. 1.5f.

673. Sin and death, as Beck has suggested.

674. That is, he entered the city, preached and then left the city, cf. Jon. 3-4.

675. Jon. 1.8.

676. Or "sentence." Cf. Jon. 1.7-16.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 24 Scripture was scattered on all the lots.
Ashes were scattered on all the sackcloth.
- 25 The lots that fell [were] as for death.
The sackcloth that was spread [was] as for life.
- 26 The lot caught the servant who had fled,
but the sackcloth put down the city that had rebelled.
- 27 The lot incited the many against one,
but the sackcloth revived many by one.
- 28 By this [lot] were opened mouths to blame.
By this [sackcloth] was opened a mouth of supplication.
- 29 The lot accused the one to kill him,
but the sackcloth had mercy on and saved the many.
- 30 This [lot] became the cause of judgment to kill,
but this [sackcloth] became the treasure of life to save,
- 31 The lot wrote names in the deep.
The sackcloth wrote names in the height.

46

The hymn begins with a consideration of the symbolic significance of the judgment of Jonah, which was in reality mercy for the Ninevites (str. 1–9). It represents baptism, on the one hand (esp. str. 3–5), and Christ’s condemnation to death, which saved all people, on the other (str. 6–9). But there is still a judgment to come for us (str. 10–16). This leads him to a consideration of sins after baptism, which are to be atoned by a combination of ablutions (or anointing?) for the sick (str. 17f.), God’s mercy (str. 19f.), repentance (str. 22) and good works (str. 23–26).

46

The same melody

- 1 Jonah intended to go down to the sea
to flee on a ship from God.
- 2 But waves rolled him about like avengers.
A lot seized him and gave him to the waves.
- 3 The lot caught him for the name of fugitive,
but not immediately and at once did it judge him.
- 4 It submerged and brought [him] up and then judged him.
That he would sink and emerge, it prophesied to him.
- 5 It portrayed a symbol even of our sins
that after the resurrection will rebuke us.
- 6 The lot portrays him who would come to save
Nineveh since it resulted in delivering her [from] death.⁶⁷⁷
- 7 The lot that resulted as if for death⁶⁷⁸
saved one hundred twenty thousand.

⁶⁷⁷ Ephrem plays on the meanings of *ps*’ “lot or judgment” and “to deliver.” No doubt he alludes to Christ as well as to Jonah as the one “who would come to save Nineveh;” cf. str. 10–12, below.

⁶⁷⁸ Jonah’s death—and Jesus’ too.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 8 One judgment that took place at sea
annulled the judgments of thousands on land.
- 9 The writ⁶⁷⁹ that judged the one
tore up twelve myriad letters of bondage.
- 10 Therefore the letter of bondage of sins that is hidden within us
is well-silenced now so that it may cry out at the End.
- 11 With us it is buried; with us it rises.
When the judgment seat is established it will cry out to rebuke.
- 12 Insofar as tears are found in our eyes,
we will blot out with our tears the letter of bondage of our sins.
- 13 Insofar as just deeds are in [our] hands,
we will close up with our just deeds all the breaches.
- 14 Who will give us [the possibility] that visible tears
will blot out concealed sins?
- 15 Who gives us [the possibility] that by visible things
an invisible wound may be healed?
- 16 Insofar as free water is found,
give to drink a valuable cup.
- 17 The baptized washed the feet of the holy ones,
so that there is no baptism [but] there is sprinkling.⁶⁸⁰
- 18 The spattering of sins after you have been baptized
can be washed with the washing of the sick.
- 19 Justice encompassed and confined us.
There is a chance for us again—grace.
- 20 Lest we be ravished, justice confined us.
Lest we succumb, grace had mercy on us.
- 21 Since there is no baptizing again, there [should be] no sinning again,
but since there is spattering, there is sprinkling.
- 22 He Who gave hope in baptism
gave repentance lest hope be cut off by Him.
- 23 But harsher is the work after you have been baptized
than that work before you have been baptized.
- 24 Sins before baptism
by simple work are able to be atoned.

679. Greek, *πράξιον*.

680. Ephrem seems to present Jesus' washing of the apostles' feet, in John 13.4–17, as a precedent for the washing of the sick—or the anointing of the sick. The enigmatic statement that "there is no baptism" is best explained as Beck suggests, that there is no second baptism.

HYMN 46

- 25 And if the imprint of scars sullies [the Christian],
baptism whitens and wipes clean.
- 26 But sins after baptism
with double works are able to be overturned.
- 27 When works and mercy have truly healed,
the imprint of scars will call for a miracle.

This hymn is an alphabetical acrostic in reverse order, although the aleph strophe is missing and a few others are repeated. It continues into the following hymn. The hymn begins with the repentance of the Ninevites (str. 1–5) and God's desire for the fruits of that repentance (str. 6–10). The exchange of repentance and mercy results in their mutual joy (str. 11–15), but in the discontent of sin and justice (str. 16–18). Since sins are like waves, the ship of Nineveh needs the rudder of fasting to stay afloat (str. 19–20). Jonah was a poor sailor since he did not wish to keep his ship, Nineveh, afloat (str. 21–24).

47

The same melody

- 1 The Ninevites repented to give offerings:
a pure fast of pure babes.
- 2 Flowing breasts they withheld from babes,
that they might suck floods of mercy.
- 3 In [Nineveh] flowed tears of repentance,
and her land shed forth all exploits.
- 4 For easy is the growth of the fruits
of this land of repentance.
- 5 Tears moistened her; mercy shone on her;
weeping rained in her; pity sprouted in her.
- 6 The King of the height saw and desired
the fruits that Nineveh grew in the depth.
- 7 The Heavenly One desired the delicious fruit,
the fruit that a flow of tears grew.
- 8 The High One hungered very much for her tears,
since He tasted remorse in her fruits.⁶⁸¹

681. On the "hunger" of God, cf. Nat. 13.13f. and Virg. 4.1.

HYMN 47

- 9 He came down and opened the treasury of mercy
to purchase by His mercy the fruits of His servants.
- 10 When mercy was consumed and He took fruits,
the avenger rejoiced that it was demanded.
- 11 Who has seen servants exchanging
with their master fruits for mercy?
- 12 Indeed what measure served there
that sufficed to measure [both] tears and mercy?
- 13 It is a measure that two weighed and stamped:
repentance and grace.⁶⁸²
- 14 By it repentance gave fruits.
By it grace gave mercy.
- 15 The two tasted of the two.
In giving and taking the two rejoiced.
- 16 The two rejoiced but [another] two were discontented:
sin below, justice above.
- 17 Sin was discontented that evil had cooled,
and justice was discontented that love had cooled.
- 18 The shedding of tears conquered the shedding of anger,
and the sentence of fasting released the sentence of judgment.
- 19 And since sins became waves and submerged [sinners],
fasts became a rudder and rescued [them].
- 20 For Nineveh had become a ship.
Anger shook⁶⁸³ it; pity steadied it.
- 21 Every sailor rescues his ship.
Jonah expected to sink his ship.
- 22 They threw him over into the sea so he would learn⁶⁸⁴
not to overthrow the city on land.
- 23 A man sank; by mercy he came up.
The one whom [mercy] rescued, expected to sink.
- 24 By mercy he came up, but he forgot mercy.
What he learned at sea, he rejected on land.

682. Here and in the following strophe Ephrem puns on *tybwʿ* and *ṭbrwʿ*, “repentance” and “grace.” In this strophe reference is made to the official stamp on certified weights used in trade.

683. Apparently the Afel of *mwʿt*, otherwise attested only in Pʿal and Ethp. as Beck notes.

684. A pun on *yʿp*, “learn,” and *ʿp*, “ship.”

This portion of the alphabetical acrostic of the previous hymn dwells on God's merciful propensity to correct the imbalances wrought by human perversity, rooted in the free will. The judgment of Jonah overturned the natural order of things; he became food for a fish and Nineveh became food for death (str. 1–5). God's mercy set this disarray into order again, as he had created it (str. 6–12). Our freedom is the source of the problem for us as for Adam (str. 13–15). But God rescues us and makes an adornment of our flaw (str. 16–22).

48

- 1 A judgment took place on the ship of Jonah.
There has not been one like it in all the houses of judgment.
- 2 The lot became for him like a judgment seat.
The fish snuffed him in like a judge.
- 3 He shut him in [his] belly, a prison,
so he could not escape from the Creator of all.
- 4 The great sea to the great fish
handed over the miserable one [who] fled from the Great One.
- 5 Since he fled, he became food for a fish,
and he gave Nineveh [as] food for death.
- 6 The Gracious One Who makes straight all perversities
set in order Jonah's contradictions.
- 7 For him He returned from within the fish.
Nineveh He snatched from the mouth of the greedy one.
- 8 He saw the man the fish swallowed.
He created [the fish] for eating, [the fish] swallowed its [intended]
eater.
- 9 Again, He saw Nineveh that the coward had captured.

HYMN 48

He created [Satan] for captivity, [Satan] captured his [intended]
captors.

- 10 Mercy rushed to straighten the perversities,
and contradictions were set in order.
- 11 He ordered the fish to spit out the man
and to return to being food for us.
- 12 He chided the evil one, and he released Nineveh.
The captured one recaptured her captor.
- 13 What is overturned⁶⁸⁵ and perverted is from freedom.
What sets in order and is made straight is from grace.
- 14 Our freedom does not cease to prevert.
His grace does not cease to make straight.
- 15 Freedom made hateful the beauty of Adam
that he might be god . . . human.
- 16 But grace adorned its flaws,
and God came to be human.
- 17 Divinity flew down
to rescue and lift up humanity.
- 18 Behold the Son adorned the servant's flaw,
so that he became god as he had desired.
- 19 To You be glory, Straightener of every fault!
To You I give thanks, Adorner of all flaws!
- 20 Since our freedom ceases not to break through,
Majesty wearies not to repair.
- 21 Your grace accompanies our evil—
the spring of peace for a raging fire.
- 22 Since wherever the fire kindles its flame,
the light of Your mercy presses hard to extinguish [it].

685. This should be *hpyk* rather than *hpsy*.

49

This hymn together with the following one is an alphabetic acrostic. Many letters are repeated; some are out of order. Here as in a previous hymn, Ephrem contrasts the behavior of Jonah with that of other models from the Old Testament. Joshua (str. 1–3), Moses (str. 4–10, 13) and Isaac (str. 11–12) all dealt better with their people and their God. Yet Jonah, because he is a type of Christ, par excellence, was the most successful (str. 15–21): In spite of him, his is the most effective Medicine of life (str. 15–17, 21); his oarsmen and God have rescued the sunken ship of Nineveh (str. 18–20).

49

The same melody

- 1 The High One sent a circumcised healer
to circumcise the heart of the uncircumcised people.
- 2 By the sword of Joshua the Hebrews were circumcised.
By the voice of Jonah the Ninevites were circumcised.
- 3 The circumcised Jonah was ashamed of the circumcised,
since he saw the uncircumcised had circumcised [their] heart.
- 4 When Moses delayed, he exposed the circumcised
since they showed by the calf the uncircumcision of [their] heart.
- 5 In the contest of forty days
the circumcised were put to shame; the uncircumcised triumphed.
- 6 The Ninevites conquered in forty days.
Instead of their bodies they circumcised their hearts.
- 7 The leaven of Egypt was hidden among the People.
It overthrew their heart for strangeness.⁶⁸⁶

686. I.e., the leaven of Egypt overthrew true faith from the heart of the Israelites and led them to the worship of strange gods.

HYMN 49

- 8 The leaven of Abraham was hidden among the peoples.
It overthrew their idol for faith.
- 9 The people of Moses tasted the sweetness.
but for forty days they vomited up bitter [words] to him.
- 10 Jonah gave Nineveh bitter [words] to drink,
but for forty days her fruits were sweet.
- 11 Isaac with words and mournful sounds
for forty days persuaded his father.
- 12 Jonah lifted Nineveh up as if at the judgment seat,
and for forty days he tortured it with his words.
- 13 Moses taught; the People apostatized.
The healer was irritated that his remedy did not avail.
- 14 Nineveh repented; it grieved Jonah.
The healer was irritated that his medicine triumphed.
- 15 The medicine of which one of the healers
has healed ten myriads of the sick?
- 16 The Medicine of penitents came down from the height.
He scattered pardon among the sins.
- 17 As much as you are irritated, Jonah, rejoice
that of all the prophets your medicines are most triumphant.
- 18 As much as you are irritated, be joyful, sailor,
that your oarsmen have rescued the sunken ship.
- 19 The High One answered the sunken ship,
for the sunken ship was all of the penitents.
- 20 He answered at sea; He answers on land.
He rescued on land as at sea.
- 21 Jonah's voice became a medicine of life.
He sowed death with it, but life sprouted.

50

This continuation of the previous hymn commences with a description of the effectiveness of the Ninevites' fast (str. 1–12). Jonah's words of judgment really belong to God, who was more pleased with the Ninevites than with the Israelites (str. 13–17). God's manner of exchange is to begin with anger, but then to show mercy if the fruits of repentance are forthcoming (str. 20–23). Since Jonah failed to understand God's ways with human beings, he needed the symbol of the gourd plant (str. 18f. and 24–27).

50

The same melody

- 1 "The generations that you saved, blessed you, Jonah.
You bore blessings instead of curses.⁶⁸⁷
- 2 "They made crowns of repentance.
They crowned Me through you since they lived through you.
- 3 "They wove blossoms that did not fade.
Instead of flowers they wove an ascetic life.
- 4 "Prayers they wove like lilies
that flourished in the flowing of tears.
- 5 "Fasts they mingled with humiliation
and prayers by means of just deeds.
- 6 "In ashes and sackcloth that make beauty fade
the crown of the saints rejoiced.
- 7 "Ashes and weeping that blind the eyes
enlightened the eyes of the Ninevites.
- 8 "Ashes and sackcloth she offered [as] blood money.
She conquered the injustice of her adversary at law.

687. God addresses Jonah, as becomes apparent in the second strophe.

HYMN 50

- 9 "She who spread ashes passed by suspicion.
She who put on sackcloth lessened anger.⁶⁸⁸
- 10 "Ashes and tears were the offering.
At the gate of heaven they made reconciliation.
- 11 "Flowing were tears hidden in eyes.
Flowing was mercy hidden in heaven.
- 12 "Flowing were tears, and they saddened faces.
Flowing was mercy, and it made them rejoice.
- 13 "O Jonah, you lifted [and] brought forth woes
and bore and brought enviable blessings.
- 14 "For they heard from you sounds of anger,
and they made Me hear [what is] Mine: sounds of praise.
- 15 "You took a hoe and went to uproot.
Your hoe belonged to the Fruit Grower.
- 16 "The vineyard that put to shame the vineyard of My beloved⁶⁸⁹
bore blessings instead of husks."
- 17 The fruits of the hateful vineyard ripened.
its fruits moistened its vineshoots.
- 18 Jonah rejoiced at the young gourd plant,
but he grieved over the vine bearing exploits.
- 19 The young plant was cut off; Jonah was irritated.
The fruits of the vineyard made the Watchers rejoice.
- 20 Give thanks to the One Who sent His anger to Nineveh
that His anger might be a merchant of mercy.
- 21 For two treasures His anger opens:
the treasure of the deep and the treasure of the height.
- 22 Urgently the fruit went up from below to the height.
Urgently mercy rained from above to the deep.
- 23 Urgently the blood money went up from below to the height.
Urgently pity came down from above to the deep.
- 24 The fig tree had reached the time of its cutting.
With the tranquil fruit⁶⁹⁰ her worker pledged.

688. Here are puns on *qtm'*, "ashes," and *qnt'*, "suspicion," and on *mkt*, "put on," and *mkkt*, "lessened."

689. The beloved of God is Israel. Israel's vineyard is put to shame by the vineyard of the Gentiles, here the people of Nineveh who repent.

690. Or the dead fruit.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 25 Jonah lifted his axe to uproot
the fig tree that suddenly had acquired health.
26 Since he wanted to cut down the beloved of the King,⁶⁹¹
the worm cut down his beloved young plant.
27 Since he did not rejoice in peace as a son of peace,
he was poured into the sea as a contentious man.⁶⁹²

691. The city of Nineveh, cf. Jon. 4.5–11.

692. Although ■ postscript reads, "Completed are the nine hymns on Jonah and Nineveh," there are only seven hymns in this set since 47–48 and 49–50 are each a single alphabetic acrostic.

51

This hymn has themes common to Middle Platonic philosophy, for example, the theme of light as representative of the presence of God and the *epinoiai* or manifestations of God appropriate to the spiritual level of the seeker.

51

On the melody: My brothers and my fathers and my sons, be persuaded by my instruction

- 1 On Sunday the light conquered and was exalted as a parable.⁶⁹³
Each one of the six days approached him and crowned him,
and also the creatures that were pleasing to him.
The new males rejoiced to see the new females:
the sheep, flocks and herds that were created,
doves with all the flying creatures,⁶⁹⁴ fish in their varieties.
He was exalted and also exalted [them].
Blossoms they wove only recently into ■ symbol of our Lord,
a crown that conquered the darkness.

Refrain: Praise to the One Whose truth confuted the liars!

- 2 For three days the light served and was hidden.
For three years our Light served and was exalted.
Of all cities He was manifested⁶⁹⁵ in Judea alone.
A second symbol is the sun that as its Lord

693. The light at the beginning of time is a symbol of Christ, who conquered sin and death on Sunday, the day of the resurrection.

694. Literally, bodies.

695. The Syriac *dnh* means "shine forth" or "manifest." The related noun *dnh'* means "dawn," "manifestation," or "epiphany." Ephrem plays on the nuances of these words, especially in the context of his major symbol here, Christ, the Sun, the Light; cf. also Nat. 1.6 and 4.69.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- was manifest in every place.
 On the fourth day⁶⁹⁶ it shone forth.
 By four books⁶⁹⁷ our Sun shone forth.
 The primal darkness abated.
 He returned a second time with His rays and blotted it out.⁶⁹⁸
- 3 In a symbol our Lord distributes light without a fee.
 He opened His treasury as grace and He scatters it.
 To each who meets Him He gives and He makes him rich.
 For to all eyes
 His gift is equal without jealousy.
 Even to the weak eye in His wisdom
 He gives from His blessings; He reaches out to it with His beams.
 Since [the weak eye] is not sufficient for His radiance,
 His energy moderated by His love He manifests to it.⁶⁹⁹
- 4 Bare faces are clothed with light and become beautiful.
 For light is the garment of the bare eye.
 When the eye had put [it] on, it did not sense that [light] clove to it,
 but only that [the light] shone forth,
 and although it is scattered and is cast into the eyes,
 [light] is not felt there and sensed.
 [It is] the symbol of our Savior, Who surpasses investigation:
 the soul in the symbol of the eye
 is filled but not able to contemplate His generation.
- 5 All creatures are endued with their beauties and varieties.
 One that is not garbed in the color of light is unsightly,
 for it is the most beautiful and pleasing of all garments.
 The eye that is naked is garbed in darkness, without argument,
 and it is endued with an unsightly color,
 and the one who strips off our Savior willingly,
 puts on black Satan,
 and with the color of gloomy Error
 the miserable one is endued again.
- 6 When there is no road at sea or on land, it is disturbing.
 In You are paths made plain and clear,

696. Cf. Gen. 1.14–19.

697. The gospels.

698. Word play on 'ἔρ, "returned," and 'ἐ', "blotted out."

699. Cf. Thphl. Ant. Autol. I.2.

HYMN 51

- and even all our stumbling blocks are reproved by Your coming.
 Reptiles and wild animals revere You freely.⁷⁰⁰
 They go away to their dens when they have seen You.
 Your manifestation to the robber persuades him without a rod,
 and without the sword's being taken up,
 [Your manifestation] withholds [and] hides the murderer's sword.
- 7 Adam and Eve newly met You.
 They saw their manifestations⁷⁰¹ in You, the Light, and rejoiced.
 They saw again in You their leaves and were saddened.
 The true Light came.
 The sinful woman garbed herself in modesty.
 Even the thief entered the blessed garden.⁷⁰²
 Darkness kissed him . . .
 . . . his flaws
 but the darkness rushed to take refuge
 in the dark.⁷⁰³
- 8 Satan and death with the serpent, their companion,
 immediately desired the Bloom [and] choked it in their assembly.
 Gloomy hot blasts surrounded it in their perfidy
 The Blossom, troubled by⁷⁰⁴
 gloom and darkness and night,
 sprouted [into] a flower in Sheol.
 It became the Tree of Life that saved creation.
 It ascended for coronation,
 and [God] magnified the coronation of Him Who conquers the
 conquerors.⁷⁰⁵
- 9 Animals saw You, the Light, and rejoiced.
 Souls saw the true Light and were cleansed.
 By a symbol of flocks, herds and sheep that met You,
 resounding rational congregations came to meet our Lord,

700. Literally, "without force."

701. Or "brightnesses."

702. *špr* has been omitted in this translation. However, Beck notes that his text is uncertain here. The word order is unusual. Cf. Luke 23.43.

703. Beck suggests, presumably on the basis of "darkness kissed him," that in addition to the cosmic struggle between light and darkness, Ephrem alludes to Judas and Jesus.

704. The Syriac is active.

705. Christ is the Blossom who becomes the Tree of Life and conquers the conquerors, Satan and death.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

and they went out with hosannas to receive Him.
Instead of the primal silence that came to meet the light,
later the mouths of the heavenly ones
came to meet our Light with glory.

- 10 Behold a wonder, my beloved ones, a Light sufficient for all they wish:

Who opened even stopped up ears and mouths,
Who made straight withered hands, Who in His love fed the hungry.

Hands He made straight give glory,
and mouths He opened chant praises,
and feet He made straight dance for joy,
and the couches whose dead He revived come to meet Him
and the hungry with their food and the debtors with their release.
"Blessed is Your coming!" they cry out.

- 11 Instead of light that wearies the living by its coming⁷⁰⁶
the true Light gives rests to the weary.
The fishermen He freed from the hard work of their fishing,
and He spares all from all.

"Leave the flock bleating in the sheepfold
and the herds⁷⁰⁷ bellowing in their mountains
and the herds⁷⁰⁸ neighing in their meadows too
and the mountains that are quarried.

Despise [and] leave these and save yourselves."

- 12 If the visible light is intangible,
how can the hidden Light be comprehended?
But if He is not able to be touched by thought,
how did they seize Him [and] crucify Him?
The light was awakened out of darkness.
In Your symbol He also emerged from the grave.
Instead of six days that came out to [the light] and were adorned,
the height and the depth and the four directions,
[these] six worship You.

706. That is, the light of morning.

707. Of cows.

708. Of horses.

The first few strophes of this hymn, to the same melody as the previous one, continue the Middle and Neo-Platonic and anti-Manichaeian themes of light and darkness as symbols of Christ and of Satan and death, respectively. In the fourth strophe, however, Ephrem uses the idea of the blinding brightness of the Light to begin a polemic against the Arians, whom he typically brands as disputers, searchers and investigators who lack humility and a sense of the limitations of their creaturely knowledge.

The same melody

- 1 Darkness was made king and conquered and was conquered,
but since it was not a being,⁷⁰⁹ it was overcome and reproved.
The evil one conquered Adam and expected not to succumb.
Although our Light was hidden,
by that light nearby He was portrayed.
Since it conquers the darkness, it was prophesied
that by the advent of our Lord Satan would succumb.
In the beginning darkness succumbed and announced that the evil
one, too,
would succumb in the End.
- 2 Therefore from before this hateful victory of his
while he had not yet conquered that Adam and been exalted,
he was first portrayed in the humiliation of the conquered darkness,
the prophet that resembles him.⁷¹⁰
The dark proclaimed about the Darkness,
and the brightness instructed about our Light.

709. A common neo-Platonic argument against Manichaeism.

710. That is, the darkness is the prophet of Satan, foreshadowing his victory over Adam.

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- O the proclaimed who resemble their proclaimers!
On Sunday the Light conquered,
and it portrayed our Savior, His day and His victory.
- 3 The sun proclaimed three symbols in the world:
that few are able to gaze at it in its strength,
for the healthy one are its rays, for the sick one are its beams.
Our Sun supplies three symbols:
that His perfect commandment is for the perfect,
and the gentle⁷¹¹ commandments for the average.⁷¹²
The perfect one is able to catch Christ by His humility.⁷¹³
Pride is sick and is unable
to consider the strength of humility.
- 4 The source of the rays is that bringing forth of our Savior.⁷¹⁴
Our mind is much too weak to investigate it.⁷¹⁵
If one hopes to investigate it,
it is revealed that he is not sufficient to the Source
Whose streams push on him and resist going out.
They eject him, cast him out and hurl him by their rushing.
If you are able, gaze at the sun's disc
that, while flying, is still.
It is wonder in its course and a wonder in its stillness!
- 5 The visible light is intangible.
The hidden Light is too fine to be touched
like a ray whose investigation slips away at all times.
If our eyes close to hold the light in them,
it fades and darkens them by its departure,
and all our minds that investigate
You, our Light, become blind,
for Your bringing forth is unsearchable,
for Your wealth is incomprehensible and Your treasure is unable to
be investigated.

711. Or "abstinent."

712. Or "the middle ones."

713. The Syriac word is the equivalent, but not a cognate, of the Greek *kenosis*.

714. The word here translated as "bringing forth" normally refers to a mother giving birth, but here the allusion is to the Father's "bringing forth" of the Son; for similar references to the "womb" of God. cf. Nat. 13.7, 21.7-8, 27.15 and 27.19.

715. Either the "bringing forth" or the Savior might be meant here.

HYMN 52

- 6 You have humbled the pride of⁷¹⁶ those bold disputers.
 You have humbled the voice of the assailing searchers.
 You have confused the faction of the attacking investigators.
 They hoped to investigate Your Light,
 but Your extent could not be grasped to be investigated,
 Your manifestation could not be cut off to be grasped,
 Your flow could not be stayed to measure Your source.
 You have hidden in Your Parent.
 If His womb can be investigated, its Offspring can also be
 comprehended.
- 7 Your bringing forth confuses us and is incomprehensible,
 and Your inquiry overtakes us and is unsearchable.
 Your Light fills us but is unable to be grasped.
 Who has searched out our Sun?
 Your extent is unable to be seized that we should know it.
 Your manifestation is ungraspable that we should measure it.
 If the [Divine] Being were comprehensible, His bringing forth
 would be investigable.
 If the Parent had been interpreted,
 it would be easy for His Offspring⁷¹⁷ to be explained.
- 8 Let us take the gnat, smallest of all creatures.
 Its body is great but not able to be weighed
 by this inquiry, the rational balance.
 O gnat, where are your viscera,
 your eye and your ear that we may touch you?
 What hand⁷¹⁸ constructed your limbs?
 You are the proclaimer of your Creator.⁷¹⁹
 In his substance the gnat became a mountain:
 Although his body is quite small, his investigation is great.

716. Literally, "for."

717. Or "his bringing forth."

718. An alliterative pun, [*aʿyāʿ*] [*iʿyāʿ*].

719. It is perhaps an anti-Marcionite polemic that led Ephrem to choose the gnat here to proclaim the Creator, since Marcion adduced fleas, snakes and other noxious creatures to argue that the Creator was not good. But Arius also contributed to the discipline of insect theology, since he argued that every creature, even the worm, since it is created by God, is in the image of God. Ephrem begins with a point more pertinent to anti-Marcionite polemic, that the little gnat proclaims its Creator, but then he turns it to his anti-Arian polemic. Since even the little gnat is not easily investigated, how much less can we investigate the Logos who created both us and the gnat?

HYMNS ON VIRGINITY

- 9 Therefore, let all the mighty creatures be left out
and more than these, the splendid human being,
and more than the human, the distant heavenly [beings].
What is left then is
for us to contemplate in silence how hidden is
this Offspring whom we despised but Who sustained us.
Let us bring our thank offering to the Awesome One
Whom they have angered by questions
and abased by investigations and limited by controversies.
- 10 Every thing has quantity and weight and measurements.
Mute and quiet and silent is their nature.
As if endowed with speech, they extend persuasion by their silence
to us
who have weighed and measured and quantified.
You, our Lord, Mind and Intellect,
have never been measured, weighed and quantified.
Rational measures cry out in the creation
that Your generation cannot be weighed
nor Your depth quantified nor Your height measured!⁷²⁰

720. Ephrem plays on the irony that although we human beings are rational, articulate creatures who should emulate the Logos, the word and mind of God, we must be taught by the irrational and speechless things of the creation to respect the inscrutability of the Logos. A postscript adds, "Completed is the writing of the hymns on virginity and on the symbols of our Lord that are fifty-one [or, according to one manuscript, "fifty-two"] in number, that blessed Mar Ephrem composed."

Index

- Aaron, 65–67
 Abel, 66, 69, 299
 Aberkios of Hierapolis, Bishop, 6
 Abgar, King, 25–26
 Abraham, 71, 73, 171–172, 299, 354, 359, 443–445
 Abraham (bishop), 22
Acts of Thomas (Ephrem), 25
 Adam, 65, 69, 71, 78, 106, 117, 361, 363–364
 Addai, 7, 25
 Adiabene, 21
Agnon, 316
 Ahaz, 166–168
 Ahha, 7
 Amida, 23
 Ammianus Marcellinus, 16, 22
 Amnon, 266–267
 Animal imagery, 38–39, 337
 Anna, 110, 113, 365, 367, 369, 374
 Antioch, 19–20
 Aphrahat, 13
 Arianism, 27
 Arians, 320
 Ark, 341–342
 Ascension, 89, 96–97, 153–154, 420–423
 Asceticism, 28, 233, 235–236, 261, 203
 Asenath, 350, 353
 Assyrians, 166–168
 Atargatis, 24
 Azizos, 24
 Babu, Bishop, 15, 17
 Babylonians, 166, 168
 Balaam, 64, 191
 Baptismal themes, 292–296, 325–328
 Bardaisan, 26
 Bar Hamor, 337, 339
 Bar Timaeus, 416–417
 Bel Marduk, 24
 Bethlehem, 202–203
 Biblical symbols, 42–43
 Bilhah, 285
 Blind man at Jericho, 329, 331
 Boaz, 65
 Caesar Julian, 16, 19, 21, 35 (*See also Hymns Against Julian*)
 Caiaphas, 328
Carmina Nisibena (Ephrem), 8, 12, 15–16, 23, 27–28, 36
 Chaldeans, 252
 Chastity, 140, 144, 148, 214–217 (*See also Virginity*)
 Cherubim, 158–160
 Christ (*See Jesus*)
 Christianity, 25–27, 411–415
 Christians: in Edessa, 25–26; and Jews, 13–14; Julian toward, 21; messianic views of, 301–303; in Nisibis, 5–8; of Persia, 13–14; in Roman Empire, 9
 Circumcision, 205, 208
 Constantine, 8–9, 12–14
 Constantius, 16, 19, 233, 243, 245–246
 Conun, 105–106
 Council of Nicea (325 C.E.), 9, 27
 Creation, 205–209
 Crucifixion, 369–371
 Cured demoniac, 329, 331

INDEX

- Darkness, 465–468
 David, 64, 79, 81, 140, 142–143, 300, 305, 394–395
 Davidic kingship, 79, 81
 Dinah, 333, 337
 Diocletian, 7
 Disciples, 369–375
Djinni, 6
Doctrine of Addai (Eusebius), 25
- Easter, 92–93
 Edessa, 3, 23–29
 Egeria, 25–26
 Egypt, flight into, 191, 197–198
 Eleazar, 337, 339
 Elijah, 68, 140, 144, 346
 Elisha, 140, 144, 156
 Elizabeth, 80, 110, 113, 118, 122, 354, 358
 Enosh, 69
 Ephrata, 202
 Ephrem, city, 345–354
 Ephrem bar Joseph, 350, 352–353
 Ephrem the Syrian (*See also* specific works of): on ascetic life, 28; baptism of, 9; birth of, 3; commentaries of, 10; and conflicts between politics and religion, 14; death of, 3, 28; early years of, 3, 8–12; in Edessa, 3, 23–29; feminine imagery in works of, 10; importance of, 3–5; as interpreter of Nisibis, 10; and Judaism, 10–11, 14–15; last years of, 17–23; and Nicene-orthodoxy, 3–4; in Nisibis, 3, 8–12, 17–23; ordination of, 28; polemics of, 10–12; political context of life of, 12–17; social context of life of, 8–12; study of, further, 47–48; teaching by, 28
 Epiphanius, 4
 Eusebius, 25
 Eve, 65, 69, 136–137, 153–155, 361, 363–364
- Feminine imagery, 10
 Fertility religion, 145–146
 Frankincense, 179, 183
- Gabriel, 80
Gads, 6
 Galileans, 248
 Garden of Eden, 316, 318
 Gentiles (*See* Peoples)
 Gideon, 300
 God: manifestations of, 461–464; philosophical notions of, 82–85; presence of, in Mary, 148–152; revelation of, 103
 Gold, 179, 184
 Golden calf, 233, 235–236
 Gourd plant, 459–460
- Hadad, 24
 Hannah, 354, 358–359
 Haran, 346
 Harps of God, 43, 369, 372, 385–398
 Harran, 20
 Heretics, 227–232
 Herod, 89, 94–96, 173–175
 Holy Spirit, 105, 107
 Hope, 187–188
 Hosea, 341, 344
 Hymns (*See also* specific hymns): feminine imagery in, 10; importance of, 3–4; selection of, 29–47
Hymns Against Heresies (Ephrem), 9, 11
Hymns Against Julian (Ephrem): animal imagery in, 38–39; *On the Church*, 221–226; divine purpose of Julian's death, 233–242; editions of, 35; as historical source, 35–36; Hymn 1, 227–232; Hymn 2, 233–242; Hymn 3, 243–248; Hymn 4, 249–257; idolatry, 243–248; and Jewish prophetic tradition, 23; literary themes of, 36–39; manuscript collection of, 34–35; positive interpretation, 227–232; theological themes of, 36–39; translations of, 35; universal didactic purpose of Julian's death, 249–257
Hymns on Faith (Ephrem), 27–28
Hymns on Paradise (Ephrem), 11–12, 34
Hymns on the Church (Ephrem), 28, 221–226
Hymns on the Epiphany (Ephrem), 30
Hymns on the Nativity (Ephrem): Abraham and Sarah story, 171–172; Ascension, 96–97; creation account, 205–

INDEX

209; defense of Christianity, 128–130; divine and human nature in Jesus, 118–125, 136, 140; Easter, 92–93; flight to Egypt, 191, 197–198; God's presence in Mary, 148–152; Hymn 1, 63–74; Hymn 2, 75–81; Hymn 3, 82–88; Hymn 4, 89–104; Hymn 5, 105–109; Hymn 6, 110–114; Hymn 7, 115–117; Hymn 8, 118–123; Hymn 9, 124–127; Hymn 10, 128–130; Hymn 11, 131–132; Hymn 12, 133–135; Hymn 13, 136–139; Hymn 14, 140–144; Hymn 15, 145–147; Hymn 16, 148–152; Hymn 17, 153–157; Hymn 18, 158–165; Hymn 19, 166–170; Hymn 20, 171–172; Hymn 21, 173–178; Hymn 22, 179–186; Hymn 23, 187–190; Hymn 24, 191–198; Hymn 25, 199–204; Hymn 26, 205–209; Hymn 27, 210–213; Hymn 28, 214–216; idolatry, 179–186; infancy narratives, 115–117; Jesus' status in, 140–144; Jesus-Caesar Augustus association, 158–165; *kenosis* in, 118, 133, 158; kingship, 75–81; literary themes of, 30–34; liturgical festivals, 199–204; Magi, 145–147, 166–170, 191–196; majesty of Jesus, 166, 168–169, 187–189; manifestation of Jesus to world, 110–114; manuscript collections of, 29–30; mariology in, 33–34; Mary-Eve association, 153–157; Mary-Jesus relationship, 131–132; Matthew's gospel, 191–198; New Testament in, 63–64; numbers/letters to Jesus' name, 210–213; Old Testament figures in, 32–33; Old Testament in, 66–68, 75–81; paradox of incarnation, 30–34, 82–92, 94–96, 173–178, 187–190; polemics of, 12; praise for incarnation, 82–88; praise of Nativity, 105–109; resurrection, 128–130; slaughter of innocents, 191, 198; testimonies on Jesus, 63–74; theological imagery in, 82, 118–119; theological themes of, 30–34; uniqueness of Mary, 124–125; vigil in, 71–74; virginity of Mary, 214–217; women in, 118, 121–122, 124, 126–127, 133–139

Hymns on the Pearl (Ephrem), 10–11
Hymns on Virginity (Ephrem): acrostics, 301–308, 430–437; animal imagery in, 337; armor forged by Moses, 320–324; ascension, 420–423; baptismal anointing, 275–286; births of Jesus, 398–402; call of Peoples, 411–415; Christianity, 411–415; creation, 333–336; disciples, 369–375; Ephrem, 345–354; harmony, 394–397; harps of God, 385–398; Hymn 1, 261–265; Hymn 2, 266–270; Hymn 3, 271–274; Hymn 4, 275–280; Hymn 5, 281–286; Hymn 6, 287–291; Hymn 7, 292–296; Hymn 8, 297–300; Hymn 9, 301–303; Hymn 10, 304–306; Hymn 11, 307–309; Hymn 12, 310–315; Hymn 13, 316–319; Hymn 14, 320–324; Hymn 15, 325–328; Hymn 16, 329–332; Hymn 17, 333–336; Hymn 18, 337–340; Hymn 19, 341–344; Hymn 20, 345–349; Hymn 21, 350–353; Hymn 22, 354–360; Hymn 23, 361–364; Hymn 24, 365–368; Hymn 25, 369–375; Hymn 26, 376–381; Hymn 27, 382–384; Hymn 28, 385–389; Hymn 29, 390–393; Hymn 30, 394–397; Hymn 31, 398–402; Hymn 32, 403–406; Hymn 33, 407–410; Hymn 34, 411–415; Hymn 35, 416–419; Hymn 36, 420–423; Hymn 37, 424–427; Hymn 38, 428–429; Hymn 39, 430–432; Hymn 40, 433–435; Hymn 41, 436–437; Hymn 42, 438–440; Hymn 43, 441–442; Hymn 44, 443–445; Hymn 45, 446–448; Hymn 46, 449–451; Hymn 47, 452–453; Hymn 48, 454–455; Hymn 49, 456–457; Hymn 50, 458–460; Hymn 51, 461–464; Hymn 52, 465–468; Jericho scriptural personalities, 416–419; Jesus in scripture, 316–319; Jewish scripture, 297–306; Jews in, 287–291; John the Baptist, 325–328; Jonah, 438–460; Judaism, 411–415; Lazarus, 390–391; light and darkness, 464–468; Lot, 428–429; manifestations of God, 461–464; manuscript collection of, 39–41; modesty, 271–274;

INDEX

- nature miracles, 407–410; oil and ointment, 275–296; Old Testament in, 403–406; passion, 420–423; Passover, 304–306; People's church, 333–336, 341–344; Peoples, call of, 411–415; presence of Jesus in disciples, 369–375; priesthood and kingship of Chosen People, 287–291; recognition of Jesus, 329–332; refuge of Jesus, 345–353; repentance, 292–296; resurrection, 420–423; role of humankind in, 43–46; role of incarnation in, 43–46; role of things in, 46–47; Samaritan woman, 354–364; Satan, 424–427; Shechem, 333–344; Solomon and Jesus as bridegrooms, 370–375; Solomon and Jesus as musicians, 382–384; spiritual marriage to Jesus, 376–381; superiority of Jesus, 337–340; symbolic presence of Jesus in natural world, 307–309; symbolic theology of, 28, 41–47; temptation of Jesus, 310–315; thanksgivings by persons and places related to gospels, 403–406; theme of, 39; virginity, 261–274, 365–368; women in, 266–270, 376–381
- Idolatry, 179–186, 243–248
- Incarnation: divine and human natures in Jesus, 118; as divine pedagogical device, 75, 81; and Mary, 44–45; Mary on, 105, 108–109; mystery of, 199–204, 369, 373; paradox of, 30–34, 82–92, 94–96, 173–178, 187–190; role of, 43–46; stages of, 179–180, 185; symbolism of, 221; theology of, 82–83; transformation of humanity by, 179, 185–186; wonder of, 64–66, 403–406
- Infancy narratives, 110–116
- Isaac, 136, 138, 300, 456–457
- Isaiah, 77, 166, 168
- Jacob, 8, 10, 15, 299, 337, 346, 350, 353
- Japheth, 66
- Jephthah's daughter, 268–269
- Jerome, 4
- Jerusalem, 20
- Jesus (*See also* Nativity): anointing of, by sinful woman, 376, 378; births of, 398–402; burial of, 128–129; and Caesar Augustus association, 158–165; circumcision of, 205, 208; coming of, 430–432; as Creator and Son of Creator, 153, 156–157; divineness of, 118–125, 136, 140; humanness of, 118–125, 136, 140; infancy of, 205, 208–209; and Jews, 297–300; *kenosis* of, 106, 158; and letters, 210–213; majesty of, 187–189; manifestation of, 110–114; and Mary, 131–134; as messiah, 301–303; music of, 382–384; in nature, 307–309, 316–319; nonviolent behavior of, 118–120; as norm of judgment, 136, 139; and numbers, 210–213; paradox of, 297–300; portrait of, 25; presence of, in disciples, 369–375; recognition of, 76–77, 329–332; refuge of, in Ephrem, 345–347, 350–353; and Satan, 320–324; saving work of, 118, 120–121; in scripture, 316–319; seeing of, 68–71; and solar phenomena, 210–213; spiritual marriage to, 376–381; superiority of, 128–129; symbolic presence of, in natural world, 307–309; symbols of, 46–47; temptation of, 47, 310–315; testimonies on, 14–15; thirty years of life of, 159–165; victory of, over Satan, 136, 424–427
- Jewish scripture, 297–306
- Jewish Temple, 20
- Jews: and Christians, 13–14; covenants of, 287–288; as goat kids, 233–234; hymn against, 227–234; and Jesus, 297–300; messianic views of, 301–303; in Nisibis, 14; offices bestowed on, 287–291; in Persia, 14
- John the Baptist, 44–45, 110, 112, 198, 212, 284, 287, 289–290, 299, 325–328, 369–371
- Jonah: and Abraham, 443–445; behavior of, 456–457; and destruction of Nineveh, 446–448; and gourd plant, 459–460; judgment of, 449–451, 454–455; and Moses, 443–445; and Nineveh, 438–441, 446–448; and Ninevites, repentant, 452–453; paradox of, 438;

INDEX

- and Peter, 441–442; words of judgment of, 458–460
 Joseph, 77–79, 105, 108, 337, 339–341, 343, 350, 353
 Joshua bar Nun, 67–68, 337, 339, 343
 Jovian, Emperor, 22
 Judah, 81, 299
 Judaism, 10–12, 14–15, 411–415
 Judas, 72, 271–272
 Julian, Emperor, 16, 19, 21, 35 (*See also Hymns Against Julian*)
 Kaleb, 67
 Kenosis, 106, 118, 131, 133, 158, 187
 Lamech, 70
 Lazarus, 390–391
 Leah, 285
 Letters, 210–213
 Levi, 299, 300
 Light, 281–286, 465–468
 Liturgical festivals, 199–204
 Logos, 187–189
 Lot, 67, 428–429
 Lot's daughters, 428–429
 Love, 261, 264–265
 Lucian of Samosata, 24
 Magi, 110, 112, 145–147, 166–167, 181, 191–196, 199–200
 Mari, 7
 Mariology, 33–34
 Marriage, spiritual, 376–381
 Martha, 376–377
 Mary: and addressing Jesus, 110–112; and birth of Jesus, 99–100, 102; blessedness of, 118, 122, 203; God's presence in, 148–152; and incarnation, 44–45; on incarnation, 105, 108–109; and letters, 211–212; as mouthpiece of Jesus, 145–146; as new Eve, 153–154; and relationship with Jesus, 77–78, 80, 131–134; types of, Ephrem's, 33–34; uniqueness of, 124–125; virginity of, 140–144, 148, 151, 214–217
 Medicine of Life (*See* Jesus)
 Melchizedek, 66, 124–125, 300
 Mesopotamia, 5–8, 13, 16
 Messiah, 211–212 (*See also* Jesus)
 Methuselah, 69–70
 Micah, 64, 77, 202
 Michael, house of, 158, 160
 Michal, 140, 142–143
 Middle Platonic philosophy, 461, 465
 Midian, 346
 Miracles, nature, 407–410
 Modesty, 271–274
 Monimos, 24
 Mosaic laws, 140
 Moses, 67–68, 77, 79, 115–116, 140, 144, 299, 320–324, 346, 391, 443–445, 456–457
 Myrrh, 179, 183–184
 Nain, 407–408
 Narses of Persia, 7
 Nathanael, 329, 331
 Nativity (*See also Hymns on the Nativity*): and Caesar Augustus, 158–159; feast of, 105, 107; liturgical theme of, 89; praise of, 115, 117; singer at, 173–175; vigil on, 173
 Nature miracles, 407–410
 Nebo, 24
 New Testament, 42–43, 63–64, 82, 87, 166, 169, 276–278
 Nicene orthodoxy, 3–4
 Nisibis: Christians in, 5–8; church of, 8; defenses of, 233, 241; Ephrem the Syrian's last years in, 17–23; Jews in, 14; under siege, 12–17
 Noah, 66, 70, 115–116, 299
 Noah's ark, 214
 Numbers, 210–213
 Oil and ointment: and baptismal themes, 292–296; for fuel, 281–286; and Jesus, symbolism of, 287–291; restorative properties of, 275, 278–279; symbolism of, 275–280
 Old Testament, 32–33, 66–68, 76, 140, 144, 275–278, 345–346, 403–406
 On the Church (Ephrem), 221–226
 On the Syrian Goddess (Lucian of Samosata), 24
 Pagan deities, 5–6, 24, 243, 245–246
 Pagan oracles, 233, 236–239

THEOLOGY LIBRARY CLAREMONT, CA

INDEX

- Palladius, 4
 Palut, Bishop, 27
 Paraclete, 179, 185–186
 Paradox, 297–300, 438, 446–448
Paschal Hymns (Ephrem), 12
 Paschal Lamb (*See* Jesus)
 Passion, 420–423
 Passover, 304–306
 People's church, 337–344
 Peoples, 191, 287–289, 411–415
 Personification, 420
 Peter, 441–442
 Pharisees, 72
 Pre-Christian religions, 5–6
 Priests, 203–204
 Purification, 206, 209

 Qona, Bishop, 26–27

 Rachel, 118, 122, 285
 Rahab, 68, 124, 126, 337, 339, 416–417
 Rape, 261, 263–264, 266–267, 333
 Rebekah, 118, 122, 285
 Resurrection, 128–130, 420–423
 Roman Empire, 9, 24
 Ruth, 65, 124, 126–127

 Samaritan woman, 354–364
 Samson, 136–137
 Samuel, 136–137
 Sarah, 118, 121–122, 136–137, 171–172, 263–264, 285, 354, 356, 359
 Satan, 310–315, 316–324, 424–427
 Saul, 394–395
 Seleucia-Ctesiphon, 21
 Seraphim, 158, 160
Sermons on Faith (Ephrem), 12, 27
 Seth, 66, 69
 Shapur II, 12–13, 15–19, 233–234
 Shechem, 333–344
 Shem, 66, 299
 Shepherds, 115–110
 Simeon, 110, 112
 Simeon bar Sabba'e, 13
 Simon, 80
 Simon Peter, 327
 Sin, 24
 Singara, 19
 Slanderers, 133, 135, 143
 Slaughter of innocents, 191, 198
 Solar phenomena, 210–213
 Solomon, 64, 369–370, 374–375
 Solomon's music, 382–384
 Soteriology, 118
 Sozomen, 4

 Tamar, 65, 124, 126, 145, 147, 266–267, 354, 359–360
 Ten, 210–211
 Thaddeus (*See* Addai)
 Theodore, 4
 Theological imagery, 82, 118–119
 Tobias, 354, 356
 Truth, 433–435

 Vigil, keeping, 71–74, 173–175
 Vineyard imagery, 221–226
 Virginité (*See also* Chastity): in *Hymns on Virginité*, 261–274, 365–368; of Mary, 140–144, 148, 151, 214–217
 Volageses, 17–18, 22

 Wine, 261, 264
 Women: in *Hymns on the Nativity*, 118, 121–122, 124, 126–127, 133–139; in *Hymns on Virginité*, 266–270, 376–381

 Yodh, 210–211

 Zacchaeus, 93, 329–330, 416–417
 Zachariah, 110, 113
 Zarephath, 346
 Zebedee's sons, 327–328
 Zechariah, 64, 80
 Zilpah, 285
 Zipporah, 140, 144

Other Volumes in this Series

- Julian of Norwich** ■ SHOWINGS
- Jacob Boehme** ■ THE WAY TO CHRIST
- Nahman of Bratslav** ■ THE TALES
- Gregory of Nyssa** ■ THE LIFE OF MOSES
- Bonaventure** ■ THE SOUL'S JOURNEY INTO GOD, THE TREE OF LIFE, and THE LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS
- William Law** ■ A SERIOUS CALL TO DEVOUT AND HOLY LIFE, and THE SPIRIT OF LOVE
- Abraham Isaac Kook** • THE LIGHTS OF PENITENCE, LIGHTS OF HOLINESS, THE MORAL PRINCIPLES, ESSAYS, and POEMS
- Ibn 'Ata' Illah** • THE BOOK OF WISDOM and Kwaja Abdullah Ansari • INTIMATE CONVERSATIONS
- Johann Arndt** ■ TRUE CHRISTIANITY
- Richard of St. Victor** ■ THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS, THE MYSTICAL ARK, and BOOK THREE OF THE TRINITY
- Origen** ■ AN EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM, PRAYER, AND SELECTED WORKS
- Catherine of Genoa** ■ PURGATION AND PURGATORY, THE SPIRITUAL DIALOGUE
- Native North American Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands** ■ SACRED MYTHS, DREAMS, VISIONS, SPEECHES, HEALING FORMULAS, RITUALS AND CEREMONIALS
- Teresa of Avila** ■ THE INTERIOR CASTLE
- Apocalyptic Spirituality** ■ TREATISES AND LETTERS OF LACTANTIUS, ADSS OF MONTIER-EN-DER, JOACHIM OF FIORE, THE FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALS, SAVONAROLA
- Athanasius** ■ THE LIFE OF ANTONY, A LETTER TO MARCELLINUS
- Catherine of Siena** ■ THE DIALOGUE
- Sharafuddin Maneri** • THE HUNDRED LETTERS
- Martin Luther** ■ THEOLOGIA GERMANICA
- Native Mesoamerican Spirituality** ■ ANCIENT MYTHS, DISCOURSES, STORIES, DOCTRINES, HYMNS, POEMS FROM THE AZTEC, YUCATEC, QUICHE-MAYA AND OTHER SACRED TRADITIONS
- Symeon the New Theologian** • THE DISCOURSES
- Ibn Al'-Aribi** ■ THE BEZELS OF WISDOM
- Hadewijch** ■ THE COMPLETE WORKS
- Philo of Alexandria** ■ THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE, THE GIANTS, AND SELECTIONS
- George Herbert** ■ THE COUNTRY PARSON, THE TEMPLE
- Unknown** • THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING
- John and Charles Wesley** ■ SELECTED WRITINGS AND HYMNS
- Meister Eckhart** • THE ESSENTIAL SERMONS, COMMENTARIES, TREATISES AND DEFENSE

Francisco de Osuna ■ THE THIRD SPIRITUAL ALPHABET
 Jacopone da Todi ■ THE LAUDS
 Fakhruddin 'Iraqi ■ DIVINE FLASHES
 Menahem Nahum of Chernobyl ■ THE LIGHT OF THE EYES
 Early Dominicans ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 John Climacus ■ THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT
 Francis and Clare ■ THE COMPLETE WORKS
 Gregory Palamas • THE TRIADS
 Pietists ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 The Shakers ■ TWO CENTURIES OF SPIRITUAL REFLECTION
 Zohar ■ THE BOOK OF ENLIGHTENMENT
 Luis de León ■ THE NAMES OF CHRIST
 Quaker Spirituality ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 Emanuel Swedenborg • THE UNIVERSAL HUMAN AND SOUL-BODY INTERACTION
 Augustine of Hippo ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 Safed Spirituality ■ RULES OF MYSTICAL PIETY, THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM
 Maximus Confessor ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 John Cassian ■ CONFERENCES
 Johannes Tauler ■ SERMONS
 John Ruusbroec • THE SPIRITUAL ESPOUSALS AND OTHER WORKS
 Ibn 'Abbād of Ronda ■ LETTERS ON THE SŪFĪ PATH
 Angelus Silesius ■ THE CHERUBINIC WANDERER
 The Early Kabbalah •
 Meister Eckhart ■ TEACHER AND PREACHER
 John of the Cross • SELECTED WRITINGS
 Pseudo-Dionysius ■ THE COMPLETE WORKS
 Bernard of Clairvaux ■ SELECTED WORKS
 Devotio Moderna • BASIC WRITINGS
 The Pursuit of Wisdom ■ AND OTHER WORKS BY THE AUTHOR OF THE CLOUD
 OF UNKNOWNING
 Richard Rolle ■ THE ENGLISH WRITINGS
 Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal ■ LETTERS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION
 Albert and Thomas • SELECTED WRITINGS
 Robert Bellarmine ■ SPIRITUAL WRITINGS
 Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain ■ A HANDBOOK OF SPIRITUAL COUNSEL
 Henry Suso • THE EXEMPLAR, WITH TWO GERMAN SERMONS
 Bérulle and the French School ■ SELECTED WRITINGS
 The Talmud ■ SELECTED WRITINGS



TRANSLATED AND INTRODUCED BY

KATHLEEN E. MCVEY

PREFACE BY

JOHN MEYENDORFF

BORDERS PRICE

\$17.95

EPHREM SYRIAN HYMNS



139

EPHREM 4721 Christianity
383093 QP 1 60597 PAUT
703-06 213710

“The HYMN of the PEARL”

This typed copy has additions in brackets by me, and, for ease of reading, is slightly changed from its printed source, which is: Hdgar Hennecki (Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English translation edited by R. McL. Wilson), *New Testament Apocrypha, Writings Relating to the Apostles; Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, Vol. 2, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, p. 498-504.

- 1 When I was a little child
And dwelt in my kingdom, the house of my father,
- 2 And enjoyed the wealth and the luxuries
Of those who brought me up,
- 3 From the East, our homeland,
 [the “east” is the place from which the sun rises. It is heaven.]
My parents provisioned and sent me;
- 4 And from the wealth of our treasury
They had already bound up for me a load.
- 5 Great it was, but so light
That I could carry it alone:
- 6 Gold from Beth 'Ellaye
And silver from great Gazak
- 7 And chalcedonies of India
And opals of the realm of Kushan.
- 8 And they girded me with adamant,
Which crushes iron.
 [some scholars suggest adamant may be diamond]
- 9 And they took off from me the splendid robe
Which in their love they had wrought for me,
- 10 And the purple toga,
Which was woven to the measure of my stature,
 [That it was woven to fit him becomes important later on]
- 11 And they made with me a covenant

And wrote it in my heart, that I might not forget:

[That the covenant is written in his heart is also important later]

12 "If thou go down to Egypt
And bring the one pearl

[Many scholars believe the pearl is the boy himself]

13 Which is in the midst of the sea,
In the abode of the loud-breathing Serpent,
[some translations say "dragon."]

14 Thou shalt put on again thy splendid robe
And thy toga which lies over it,

15 And with thy brother, our next in rank,
Thou shalt be heir in our kingdom."

16 I quitted the East and went down,
Led by two couriers,

17 For the way was dangerous and difficult
And I was very young to travel it.

18 I passed over the borders of Mesene,
The meeting-place of the merchants of the East,

19 And reached the land of Babel,
And entered in to the walls of Sarburg.

20 I went down into Egypt
And my companions parted from me.

21 I went straight to the serpent,
Near by his abode I stayed,

22 Until lie should slumber and sleep,
That I might take my pearl from him.

23 And since I was all alone
I was a stranger to my companions of my hostelry.
[note: he was all alone, not because there were no other people,
but because he was not like the other people]

24 But one of my race I saw there,
A nobleman out of the East,

- 25 A youth fair and lovable,
26 An anointed one,
And he came and attached himself to me
27 And I made him my intimate friend,
My companion to whom I communicated my business.
28 We warned each other against the Egyptians
And against consorting with the unclean.
29 But I clothed myself in garments like theirs,
That they might not suspect that I was come from without
30 To take the pearl,
And so might waken the serpent against me.
31 But from some cause or other
They perceived that I was not their countryman,
32 And they dealt with me treacherously
And gave me to eat of their food.
33 And I forgot that I was a king's son
And served their king.
34 And I forgot the pearl
For which my parents had sent me.
35 And because of the heaviness of their food
I fell into a deep sleep.
36 And all this that befell me
My parents observed and were grieved for me.
37 And a proclamation was published in our kingdom
That all should come to our gate,
38 The kings and chieftains of Parthia
And all the great ones of the East.
39 They made a resolve concerning me,
That I should not be left in Egypt,
40 And they wrote to me a letter And every noble

Set his name thereto:

- 41 "From thy father, the king of kings,
And thy mother, the mistress of the East,
- 42 And from thy brother, our other son,
To thee, our son in Egypt, greeting!
- 43 Awake and rise up from thy sleep,
[You have heard those words before]
And hearken to the words of our letter.
- 44 Remember that thou art a son of kings.
See the slavery -- Him whom thou dost serve!
- 45 Remember the pearl
For which thou didst journey into Egypt
- 46 Remember thy splendid robe,
And think of thy glorious toga,
- 47 That thou mayest put them on and deck thyself therewith,
That thy name may be read in the book of the heroes
- 48 And thou with thy brother, our crown prince,
Be heir in our kingdom."
- 49 And the letter was a letter
Which the king had sealed with his right hand
- 50 Against the wicked, the people of Babel
And the rebellious demons of Sarburg.
- 51 It [the letter, which is the endowment] flew in the form of an eagle,
The king of all birds,
- 52 It flew and alighted beside me
And became all speech.
- 53 At its voice and the sound of its rustling
I awoke and stood up from my sleep, [note those words]
- 54 I took it and kissed it,
Broke its seal and read.

- 55 And even as it was engraven in my heart
 Were the words of my letter written.
 [He knew it was true because it was the same as the covenant
 which had been written on his heart in the premortal existence.]
- 56 I remembered that I was a son of kings
 And my noble birth asserted itself.
- 57 I remembered the pearl
 For which I was sent to Egypt,
- 58 And I began to cast a spell
 On the terrible loud-breathing serpent.
- 59 I brought him to slumber and sleep
 By naming my father's name over him,
- 60 And the name of our next in rank
 And of my mother, the queen of the East.
- 61 And I snatched away the pearl
 And turned about, to go to my father's house.
- 62 And their dirty and unclean garment
 I took off and left in their land,
- 63 And directed my way that I might come
 To the light of our homeland, the East.
- 64 And my letter, my awakener,
 I found before me on the way;
- 65 As with its voice it had awakened me,
 So it led me further with its light,
- 66 Written on Chinese tissue with ruddle,
 [fine paper with gold lettering]
 Gleaming before me with its aspect
- 67 And with its voice and its guidance
 Encouraging me to speed,
- 68 And drawing me with its love.
- 69 I went forth, passed through Sarburg,

Left Babel on my left hand

- 70 And came to the great city
Mesene, The haven of the merchants,
- 71 Which lies on the shore of the sea.
- 72 And my splendid robe which I had taken off,
And my toga with which it was wrapped about,
- 73 From the heights of Hyrcania
My parents sent thither
- 74 By the hand of their treasurers,
Who for their faithfulness were trusted therewith.
- 75 Indeed I remembered no more its dignity,
For I had left it in my childhood in my father's house,
- 76 But suddenly, when I saw it over against me,
The splendid robe became like me, as my reflection in a mirror;
- 77 I saw it wholly in me,
And in it I saw myself quite apart from myself,
- 78 So that we were two in distinction
And again one in a single form.
[That is, he sees himself as two people in one. There is the person who had
the experiences on the earth, and the person of glory who he was, is, and will be.
These two come together to make the one person which is his total Self.]
- 79 And the treasurers too
Who had brought it to me, I saw in like manner,
- 80 That they were two of a single form,
For one sign of the king was impressed upon them,
- 81 [There is a tear in the original manuscript here so it cannot be read.
Apparently it says, referring to the king,]
He who restored to me through them
my pledge [covenant] and my riches,
- 82 My splendid robe adorned
Gleaming in glorious colours,

- 83 With gold and beryls,
Chalcedonies and opals,
- 84 And sardonyxes of varied colour,
This also made ready in its grandeur,
- 85 And with stones of adamant
Were all its seams fastened.
- 86 And the likeness of the king of kings
Was completely embroidered all over it
[That is important. The rob (the inner garment) had symbols on it
which represented the boy's being like God.]
- 87 And like stones of sapphire again in its
Grandeur resplendent with manifold hues.
- 88 And again I saw that all over it
The motions of knowledge were Stirring.
- 89 And I saw too
That it was preparing as for speech.
- 90 I heard the sound of its songs
Which it whispered at its descent:
- 91 "I belong to the most valiant servant,
For whom they reared me before my father,
- 92 And I perceived also in myself
That my stature grew according to his labours."
[While the boy was wallowing in the muck of this world, the robe
had to grow so it would still be able to fit the boy when he returned.
His experiences were the source of this growth.]
- 93 And with its royal movements
It poured itself entirely toward me,
- 94 And in the hands of its bringers
It hastened, that I might take it;
- 95 And my love also spurred me
To run to meet it and receive it,
- 96 And I stretched out and took it.

With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself.

- 97 And my toga of brilliant colours
 I drew completely over myself.
- 98 I clothed myself with it and mounted up
 To the gate of greeting and homage.
- 99 I bowed my head and worshipped
 The splendour of the father
 who had sent the robe to me,
- 100 Whose commands I had accomplished,
 As he also had done what he promised.
- 101 And at the gate of his satraps
 I mingled among his great ones.
- 102 For he rejoiced over me and received me,
 And I was with him in his kingdom.
- 103 And with the sound of the organ
 All his servants praise him.
- 104 And he promised me that to the gate
 Of the king of kings I should journey with him again
- 105 And with my gift and my pearl
 With him appear before our king.

SAINT EPHREM

**HYMNS
ON
PARADISE**

Introduction and translation
by
SEBASTIAN BROCK

**ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS
CRESTWOOD, NEW YORK 10707
1990**

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ephraem, Syrus, Saint, 303-373.

[Hymni de paradiso. English]

Hymns on paradise / St. Ephrem the Syrian;
[commentary] by Sebastian Brock; with translation from
Syriac by Sebastian Brock.

p. cm.

Translation of: Hymni de paradiso and Section 2 of
Commentarium in Genesim.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-88141-076-4

1. Paradise—Early works to 1800. 2. Hymns, Syriac—
Translations into English—Early works to 1800. 3. Bible.
O.T. Genesis II-III—Commentaries I. Brock, Sebastian P.
II. Ephraem, Syrus, Saint, 303-373. Commentarium in
Genesim. Section 2. English. 1989.
III. Title.

BR65.E633H9613 1990

264'. 01402—dc20

89-37281

CIP

r89

Translation © 1990

ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

ISBN 0-88141-076-4

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BY

ATHENS PRINTING COMPANY

New York, NY 10018

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	7
The Life of St Ephrem	8
St Ephrem and Monasticism	25
St Ephrem's Writings	33
Poetic Form	36
St Ephrem's Theological Vision	39
Types and Symbols	41
The Garment of Words	45
St Ephrem's Concept of Paradise	49
The Two Trees	57
The Fence and the Sword	62
The Robe of Glory	66
Paradise Regained: Divinization	72
The Present Translation	74
2. THE HYMNS ON PARADISE	77
Hymn I	77
Hymn II	84
Hymn III	90
Hymn IV	97
Hymn V	101
Hymn VI	108
Hymn VII	118
Hymn VIII	131
Hymn IX	135
Hymn X	147
Hymn XI	153
Hymn XII	159
Hymn XIII	168

Hymn XIV	175
Hymn XV	181
Notes to the Hymns on Paradise	189
3. THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS (SECTION II)	197
Notes to Section II of the Commentary on Genesis	225
4. BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	228
Index 1: Biblical References:	234
Index 2: Proper Names	236
Index 3: Subjects	237



1.

INTRODUCTION

To many people St Ephrem the Syrian will be known best for the beautiful prayer, attributed to him, used during the Lenten Fast¹:

O Lord and Master of my life, give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk, but give to me Thy servant a spirit of soberness, humility, patience, and love. O Lord and King, grant me to see my own faults and not to condemn my brother: for blessed art Thou to the ages of ages. Amen. O God, cleanse me a sinner.

But Ephrem also happens to be a religious poet of quite outstanding stature, one who deserves to rank alongside the greatest of theologian poets in the Christian tradition. That he has only rarely been recognized as such is due largely to the inaccessibility of his works, written in Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic) and for the most part poorly served by translations into modern languages. Indeed it is only within the last thirty or so years that reliable editions of the original texts of his works have appeared, thanks to the labors of Dom Edmund Beck, O.S.B.

¹*The Lenten Triodion* (translated by Mother Mary and Archimandrite Kallistos Ware; London and Boston, 1978), pp. 69-70.

It is with the aim of making up, in a small way, for this deficiency as far as English is concerned, that the present translation is offered. The cycle of fifteen hymns on Paradise has been chosen since it offers a fine example of the way in which St Ephrem is able to weave a profound theological synthesis organized around a particular Biblical narrative, in this case Genesis chapters 2 and 3. By penetrating beyond the letter of the text he succeeds in drawing out its inner meaning and in relating this to the Christian message as a whole; all this he achieves through the medium of poetry, not the vehicle we usually associate with theological writing today, but which nonetheless is capable of conveying theological insights in a manner that is at once dynamic and compelling. Who then was this remarkable man?

The Life of St Ephrem

On the surface it might appear that this fourth-century saint's life was extremely well documented, for there exist not only biographies in both Greek and Syriac, but also a variety of texts which claim to be autobiographical, most notable among them being a Testament. The majority of these texts, however, do not stand up well under any critical examination, and the Syriac biography in particular can be shown to be a comparatively late work, written in the sixth century, at least 150 years after St Ephrem's death, and full of unhistorical material, such as visits to St Basil in Cappadocia and to St Bishoi in Egypt.

In order, then, to gain some reasonably reliable picture of St Ephrem, it will be wisest to treat the biographical references chronologically in order of their appearance.

First and foremost come the very rare allusions in St Ephrem's genuine works. Two passages imply that his

parents were Christian: in the last stanza of Hymn XXVI Against the Heresies he writes:

These two things belong to our Lord:
the time when I was to enter into the created world
and when it will be beneficial for me to leave it.
I was born in the path of truth,
even though my childhood was unaware;
but once I grew aware I acquired it in the furnace.²
The crooked paths that I came across
did my faith spurn,
for they led to the position on the left [Matthew 25:33].
Because I have acknowledged You, Lord, do You
acknowledge me;
have compassion on this sinner who has believed in You,
for even if he sins, he still knocks at Your door,
even if he is sluggish, he still travels on Your road.

A similar passage occurs in the Hymns on Virginity, XXXVII.10:

Your truth was with me in my youth,
Your faithfulness is with my old age.

From a cycle of hymns on the town of Nisibis (on the easternmost frontier of the Roman Empire, modern Nusaybin in southeast Turkey) we learn that St Ephrem served as a deacon and catechetical teacher under a series of remarkable bishops. The first of these was St Jacob of Nisibis, one of the "318" Fathers who attended the Council of

²This is probably an allusion to his baptism: the font is frequently referred to as a furnace in Syriac baptismal tradition (the Syrian Orthodox baptismal service speaks of "the renewal of Adam, God's image, in the furnace of baptism"); see S. P. Brock, *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (Syrian Churches Series 9, 1979), pp. 13, 135.

Nicaea in 325. It was on Jacob's return home that, according to a late sixth-century writer,³ he appointed Ephrem to a teaching position. Jacob, who died in 338 or shortly after, was followed by Babu (c. 338-50), Vologeses (c. 350-361) and Abraham (c. 361-?). During these years Nisibis was besieged on three separate occasions (338, 346 and 350) by the Persian army. The last of these sieges was particularly dramatic, for the Persian king Shapur II dammed the local river in order to flood the surroundings of the town; the first of Ephrem's Nisibene hymns describes this event, and compares the town to Noah's Ark floating on the waters of the Flood: Nisibis herself speaks in stanza 3,

All kinds of storms trouble me
 and I count the Ark fortunate:
 only waves surrounded it,
 but ramps and arrows as well as waves surround me.
 The Ark acted as a store for treasure for You,
 but I have become a deposit of sins.
 The Ark subdued the waves through Your love,
 whereas I have been blinded amidst the arrows
 through Your anger.
 The Flood bore the Ark,
 while me the river threatens.
 O Helmsman of the Ark,
 be my pilot on dry land;
 You rested the Ark on the haven of a mountain,
 give rest to me too in the haven of my walls.

The city survived all three sieges and once hostilities between the two empires had subsided Bishop Vologeses was able to undertake some notable building enterprises. A

³Barhadbeshabba of Ḥalwan, *The Origin of the Schools*, in *Patrologia Orientalis* 4, p. 63. For the early bishops of Nisibis see J-M. Fiey, *Nisibe* (CSCO 388 = Subsidia 54, 1977), pp. 21-36.

baptistery of remarkably fine workmanship⁴ survives to this day incorporated into the Church of St Jacob of Nisibis (whose crypt still houses the tomb of St Jacob). The building's original function and the date are recorded in Greek in an inscription which reads as follows:

This baptistery was erected and completed in the year 671 [= A.D. 359/60] in the time of Bishop Volageses through the zeal of the priest Akepsimas. May this inscription be a memorial to them.

We thus have a direct link with a building in which St Ephrem will have functioned as deacon.

In 363 the emperor Julian was killed in the course of a Roman incursion into Persian territory, and as part of the ensuing peace treaty Nisibis was handed over to the Persians. The historian Ammianus Marcellinus informs us that one of the conditions laid down was that the Christian population of Nisibis should leave. Among the numerous refugees was St Ephrem, perhaps now in his late fifties. In due course he made his new home in Edessa (modern Urfa), some 100 miles further west, and it was there that he spent the last decade of his life. Many of Ephrem's hymns and prose works clearly belong to his time at Edessa, for they reflect the more hellenized culture of that town and the intellectual ferment brought about by speculative theological thinking among the followers of Marcion, Bardaisan of Edessa, Mani, Arius and others; much of Ephrem's energy was expended on combating these perversions of the faith.

While the year of St Ephrem's birth is not known, that of his death is certain, 373. The precise date, however, is variously given, but perhaps most likely to be correct is

⁴See G. Bell (ed. M. M. Mango), *The Churches and Monasteries of the Tur 'Abdin* (London, 1982), pp. 142-5, plates 70-83.

June 9th, provided by the sixth-century Chronicle of Edessa (the 15th, 18th and 19th of June are the dates given in other sources).

The earliest external witness⁵ to St Ephrem and his literary activity is provided by St Jerome in his book on famous men, written in 392, nineteen years after St Ephrem's death; here he tells us that "Ephrem, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, wrote a great deal in the Syriac language. He attained such distinction that his writings are read in some churches after the Scriptural lections. I have read a work of his on the Holy Spirit, which someone had translated from Syriac into Greek, and even in translation I could recognize the acumen of a lofty intellect."

Next in date is Palladius' *Lausiac History* (419/20), in which chapter 40 is devoted to St Ephrem. Here it is interesting to find the earliest portrayal of Ephrem as a monk (Palladius speaks of "his cell"), but as we shall see, this is an anachronistic feature, since St Ephrem probably only came into contact with Egyptian-style monasticism right at the end of his life. Palladius' descriptions of his efforts at famine relief, however, are very probably reliable. The following translation is made from the early Syriac version of the *Lausiac History*; the translator has added at both the beginning and the end material which is absent from the Greek (paragraphs 1 and 3 below):⁶

⁵It has sometimes been supposed that "the Syrian" mentioned by St Basil in his second homily on the Hexaemeron is to be identified with St Ephrem, but this is most unlikely; it was, however, probably on the basis of such an identification that Sozomen (in a passage quoted below) stated that St Basil greatly admired St Ephrem. Later tradition held that the two saints actually met (see note 12).

⁶Translated from R. Draguet's edition in CSCO 398 = *Scriptores Syri* 173, pp. 286-9 (for parallels to the translator's additions see Draguet's French translation in CSCO 399 = *Scr. Syri* 174, p. 190). On St Ephrem and monasticism, see below.

One of the Holy Fathers saw in a dream a band of holy angels come down from heaven at God's behest. One of them was holding in his hand a scroll written both on the inside and on the outside. They were asking each other, "To whom should this be entrusted?" Some of them said to one particular person, while others to another; yet others, however, said "These people are indeed saints and upright, but they are not capable of being entrusted with it." Having mentioned the names of many other saints, they finally said, "No one can be entrusted with this apart from Ephrem." Thereupon they gave it to him. When the father arose in the morning he heard people saying, "Ephrem teaches as if a fountain was flowing from his mouth." Then the elder who had seen the dream recognized that what issued from his lips was from the Holy Spirit.

This Ephrem is one of the saints who is worthy of mention. He journeyed excellently and uprightly along the spiritual path, never turning to either side from the straight path. He was held worthy of natural knowledge, and subsequently of the divine, and of perfect beatitude.⁷ Having continually lived a chaste life in quietude for a specific number of years, edifying in a variety of different ways all those who came to visit him, he eventually felt compelled to leave his cell for the following reason: a dire famine weighed down on the town of Edessa, and in his compassion for the condition of the people who were wasting away and perishing, observing that those who were hoarding grain in their storehouses had no sense of pity, he addressed them as follows: "How long will you fail to pay attention to God's compassion, allowing

⁷Palladius here quotes from Evagrius' prologue to his *Praktikos* (ed. Guillaumont, *Sources chrétiennes* 171, p. 492).

your wealth to be corrupted, to the condemnation and damnation of your own souls?" They decided among themselves to say to him, "We have no one we can trust with providing for those who are dying of starvation; for everyone is dishonest, and will act in an underhand way." Ephrem replied, "What opinion do you have of me?" for he had a great reputation with everyone, in a quite genuine and unfeigned way. They answered, "We know you are a man of God." "In that case," he said, "entrust me with the business; I will devote myself to becoming a hostel manager." Having received some money he began to shut off suitable areas in the streets, and saw to the provision of three hundred beds; some of these were to be used for burying those who had died; while other were for those who still had some hope of life to lie upon. Furthermore, he also had all those suffering from starvation in the villages brought in and given beds. He spent every day in constant attendance on them, seeing to their every need with great caring, making use of the means available to him. This he did joyfully, with the help of those whom he had asked to assist in the matter.⁸ When that year of famine had passed, and the following year was one of plenty, everyone returned home, there being nothing left to do. Ephrem then went back to his cell and ended his life a month later, God having provided this means of crowning the end of his life. He left many books and various compositions worthy of careful attention.

It is said of him that when he was a boy he saw a dream—or a vision—in which a vine shoot sprung up from his tongue; it grew and everywhere under the

⁸The Greek text is rather shorter at this point and contains no mention of the relief work being extended to the villages: perhaps this information was based on local memories of the event.

heavens was filled by it; it bore bunches of grapes in proliferation, and all the birds of the sky came and ate of its fruits; the more they ate, the more the bunches multiplied and grew.

There is no reason to doubt the historicity of the narrative about St Ephrem's role in the famine, and it is significant that the chronological details at the end of this paragraph fit well with the date given in the Chronicle of Edessa for his death, June 9th; the year of famine will have run from the failure of the wheat harvest (no doubt due to drought) in early summer 372 to the first grain crop (barley) of 373, harvested in early May.

Some twenty or more years after Palladius wrote his *Lausiac History* the church historian Sozomen devoted an interesting chapter to St Ephrem, which is worth quoting almost in full, despite its length.⁹

Ephrem the Syrian was entitled to the highest honors, and was the greatest ornament of the catholic Church. He was a native of Nisibis, or his family was of the neighboring territory. He devoted his life to monastic philosophy; and although he received no instruction, he became, contrary to all expectation, so proficient in the learning and language of the Syrians, that he comprehended with ease the most abstruse theorems of philosophy. His style of writing was so filled with splendid oratory and with richness and temperateness of thought that he surpassed the most approved writers of Greece. If the works of these writers were to be translated into Syriac, or any other

⁹Ecclesiastical History III.16. I use C. D. Hartranft's translation in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series II, vol. 2 (Oxford and New York, 1891), with a few small modifications. In VI.34 Sozomen again mentions St Ephrem, among notable monastic figures from the Edessa area.

language, and divested, as it were, of the beauties of the Greek language, they would retain little of their original elegance and value. The productions of Ephrem have not this disadvantage: they were translated into Greek during his life, and translations are even now being made, and yet they preserve much of their original force, so that his works are not less admired when read in Greek than when read in Syriac. Basil, who was subsequently bishop of the metropolis of Cappadocia, was a great admirer of Ephrem, and was astonished at his erudition. The opinion of Basil, who is universally confessed to have been the most eloquent man of his age, is a stronger testimony, I think, to the merit of Ephrem, than anything that could be indited to his praise. It is said that he wrote three hundred thousand verses, and that he had many disciples who were zealously attached to his doctrines. The most celebrated of his disciples were Abbas, Zenobius, Abraham, Maras, and Simeon, in whom the Syrians and whoever among them pursued accurate learning make a great boast. Paulonas and Aranad are praised for their finished speech, although they are reported to have deviated from sound doctrine.

I am not ignorant that there were some very learned men who formerly flourished in Osrhoene, as, for instance, Bardaisan, who devised a heresy designated by his name, and Harmonius, his son. It is related that this latter was deeply versed in Greek erudition, and was the first to subdue his native tongue to metres and musical laws; these verses he delivered to the choirs, and even now the Syrians frequently sing, not the precise copies by Harmonius, but the same melodies. For as Harmonius was not altogether free from the errors of his father, and entertained various opinions concerning the soul, the generation and the

destruction of the body, and the regeneration which are taught by the Greek philosophers, he introduced some of these ideas into the lyrical songs which he composed. When Ephrem perceived that the Syrians were charmed with the elegance of the diction and the rhythm of the melody, he became apprehensive, lest they should imbibe the same opinions; and therefore, although he was ignorant of Greek learning, he applied himself to the understanding of the metres of Harmonius, and composed similar poems in accordance with the doctrines of the Church, and wrote also sacred hymns and the praises of passionless men. From that period the Syrians sang the odes of Ephrem according to the law of the ode established by Harmonius. The execution of this work is alone sufficient to attest the natural endowments of Ephrem.

He was as celebrated for the good actions he performed as for the rigid course of discipline he pursued. He was particularly fond of tranquility. He was so serious and so careful to avoid giving occasion to calumny, that he refrained from the very sight of women. It is related that a female of careless life, who was either desirous of tempting him, or who had been bribed for the purpose, contrived on one occasion to meet him face to face, and fixed her eyes intently on him; he rebuked her, and commanded her to look down upon the ground. "Why should I obey your injunction," replied the woman, "for I was born not of the earth, but of you? It would be more just if you were to look down upon the earth from which you sprang, while I look upon you, as I was born of you." Ephrem, astonished at the woman, recorded the whole matter in a book, which most Syrians regard as one of the best of his productions.¹⁰

¹⁰No extant work by Ephrem mentions such an episode.

It is also said of him that, although he was naturally prone to passion, he never exhibited angry feeling toward anyone from the period of his embracing a monastic life. It once happened that after he had, according to custom, been fasting several days, his attendant, in presenting some food to him, let fall the dish on which it was placed. Ephrem, seeing that he was overwhelmed with shame and fear, said to him, "Take courage; we will go to the food as the food does not come to us"; and he immediately seated himself beside the fragments of the dish, and ate his supper.

What I am about to relate will suffice to show that he was totally exempt from the love of vainglory. He was appointed bishop of some town, and attempts were made to convey him away for the purpose of ordaining him. As soon as he became aware of what was intended, he ran to the marketplace, and showed himself as a madman by stepping in a disorderly way, dragging his clothes along, and eating in public. Those who had come to carry him away to be their bishop, on seeing him in this state, believed that he was out of his mind, and departed; and he, meeting with an opportunity for effecting his escape, remained in concealment until another had been ordained in his place.

What I have now said concerning Ephrem must suffice, although his own countrymen relate many other anecdotes of him. Yet his conduct on one occasion, shortly before his death, appears to me so worthy of remembrance that I shall record it here.

At this point Sozomen gives an account of Ephrem's charitable work during the famine; since Sozomen has drawn closely on Palladius' narrative for this, the section is omitted here. Sozomen then continues:

He attained no higher clerical order than that of deacon, although he became no less famous for his virtue than those who are ordained to the priesthood and are admired for the conversation of a good life and for learning. I have now given some account of the virtue of Ephrem.

Much in Sozomen's chapter is positively misleading: he develops the false hint already given by Palladius that Ephrem was a monk (the ascetic ideals by which Ephrem almost certainly did live are discussed below); he gives an account of the origins of Syriac hymnography which is likely to be both tendentious and incorrect¹¹; and his portrait of Ephrem as shunning the face of women hardly conforms with the great tenderness for, and understanding of, women that St Ephrem's genuine writings exhibit, or with the fact that he wrote many of his hymns specifically for women's choirs (this is evident on internal grounds as well as from the testimony of Jacob of Serugh, quoted below). All this makes it very unlikely that any reliance can be placed on the story of how he avoided being consecrated a bishop; this very probably arose out of an attempt to explain why he never advanced beyond the rank of deacon.

Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History*, written ca. 449/50, likewise contains a chapter on Ephrem (IV.29). Whereas in Sozomen the section on Ephrem follows one on Didymus the Blind, Theodoret couples the two writers; what he has to say about Ephrem is quite short, and confined to the fame of his verse compositions. Theodoret would appear to be drawing almost entirely on Sozomen (or, possibly, a common source), though he does add that Ephrem's hymns were still used in his day at festivals in honor of the martyrs. Earlier in the *Ecclesiastical History* (II.30),

¹¹See below, on "Poetic Form."

when narrating the life of St Jacob of Nisibis, Theodoret states that it was Ephrem who urged Jacob to mount the city walls during the siege of 338 and rebuke the Persian King Shapur II for his blasphemy. In the *Historia Philothea*, however, where the same episode is recounted, no mention is made of Ephrem's role.

From the end of the fifth century we have another short notice in Latin, given by Gennadius in his supplement to Jerome's book on famous men. Chapter 3, which is really about Ephrem's disciple Paulonas, reads as follows:

The priest Paulonas, a disciple of the blessed Ephrem the deacon, was a man of keen intellect and learned in the divine Scriptures. While his master was alive he was famous among the Doctors of the Church, especially as an orator, but after Ephrem's death, out of love for high position and fame, he separated himself from the Church and wrote a great deal against the faith. It is said that on his death-bed the blessed Ephrem addressed him with this warning: "Paulonas, see that you do not give way to your own imaginings; when you think you have attained to an understanding of God, then believe that you have not understood at all." For Ephrem sensed from his studies and writings that he would track out novel ideas and stretch his intellectual powers to the limit, for which reason Ephrem often called him "the new Bardaisan."

Later, in chapter 67, Gennadius makes passing mention of "Ephrem the deacon's poem on the destruction of Nicomedia" (by earthquake on the 24th of August 358). This is a work which survives complete only in an Armenian translation.

With the Syriac life we are already well into the sixth century, for, thanks to a topographical detail concerning

the course of the river Daisan around (and not through) Edessa, we can be sure that this life dates from at least the third decade of the sixth century, for it presupposes the diversion of the river Daisan sponsored by the emperor Justinian in the aftermath of a disastrous flood in April 525.

Not surprisingly the author of this life (which comes down to us in three slightly different forms) draws heavily on the information provided by earlier writers. What he has to add that is new is unfortunately of no historical value. Thus, for example, Ephrem is made out to be the child of a pagan priest—something which can hardly be squared with Ephrem's own declaration that he was brought up "in the way of truth." Equally unhistorical are his travels to Egypt to visit St Bishoi (Pisoës), and to Cappadocia to visit St Basil. This latter, well-known, episode, where St Ephrem is miraculously endowed with the ability to speak Greek, is probably an elaboration of the identification, first encountered in Sozomen, of the anonymous "Syrian," mentioned by St Basil, with St Ephrem.¹² The account in the Syriac life ends with a serious anachronism, since it describes St Basil as dying before St Ephrem: in fact he died in 379, six years after Ephrem's death.

Despite the unhistorical character of the episode of St Ephrem's meeting with St Basil, it does reflect some truth on quite a different plane, in that the theological interests and message of the two Fathers, although expressed in outwardly very different ways, are remarkably similar. (The similarity in fact extends to others of the Cappadocian Fathers, notably St Gregory of Nyssa).

¹²On the episode see O. Rousseau, "La rencontre de S. Ephrem et de S. Basile," *L'Orient Syrien* 2 (1957), pp. 261-84, and 3 (1958), pp. 73-90. Although unhistorical, the meeting of these two great saints does correctly express, at a different level, the underlying harmony between their two separate theological approaches.

The Greek lives, three of which are printed in volume 1 of the great eighteenth-century edition of St Ephrem's works, contain little or nothing that is of historical value, and so are passed over here. The same applies to the various Syriac texts which purport to be autobiographical; earliest among these, but probably not even with a genuine core, is the Testament.

One further source should be mentioned here, the verse panegyric on St Ephrem by the chorepiskopos Jacob of Serugh, next after Ephrem perhaps the greatest of Syriac poets (although writing in a very different style). Since Jacob died in 521, his poem will date from before the composition of the Syriac prose life. As might be expected, his poem contains little historical material. Jacob sees Ephrem above all as someone who combined both words and actions¹³:

A true worker who labored diligently from start to finish,
 manifesting in himself both words and actions in a
 practical way,
 he was an architect who built upon the foundation of
 truth,
 finishing off his edifices with gold and precious stones.
 He was the teacher of truth who both acted and taught,
 as it is written;
 for his disciples he depicted a model for them to imitate.
 . . . He did not just teach through the toil of speech,
 but he manifested in his own person the activity of
 perfect sainthood.

But more interesting is what Jacob has to say about Ephrem as a poet who wrote specifically for women. Two passages in particular are worth quoting¹⁴:

¹³Edited by P. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, (Paris and Leipzig, 1892), pp. 667, 677.

¹⁴Pp. 668, 672.

The wise Moses made the virgins
not to hold back from the praise that was requisite,
so too Ephrem, who proved a second Moses for women
folk,
taught them to sing praise with the sweetest of songs.

And, in more detail,

The blessed Ephrem saw that the women were silent
from praise
and in his wisdom he decided it was right that they
should sing out;
so just as Moses gave timbrels to the young girls,
thus did this discerning man compose hymns for virgins.
As he stood among the sisters it was his delight
to stir these chaste women into songs of praise;
he was like an eagle perched among the doves
as he taught them to sing new songs of praise with
pure utterance.

Flocks of meek partridge surrounded him,
learning how to sing a sweet song in purity of voice;
he taught the swallows to warble
and the Church resounded with the lovely sound of
chaste women's voices.

This is what Ephrem said to the pure women
as he instructed them how to sing praise:

"O daughters of the nations, approach and learn a new
form of praise
to Him who has delivered you from the error of your
ancestors;
you have been rescued from the worship of dead idols,
so give praise to Him by whose death you were freed.
You put on the robe of praise from the Font, as did
your brothers,
and from the single Chalice did you receive new life
along with them.

You and they have experienced a single salvation, so
why then
have you not learned to sing praise with a loud voice?
Your voice has been silent because your mother Eve
closed it,
but now, through your sister Mary, it has been opened
again to give praise.
Whereas the aged Eve devised a stone of silence for
your tongue,
her young daughter has undone the bonds so that you
can shout out;
the married Eve placed a muzzle of silence on your
mouths,
but the Virgin has opened the closed door with your
hosannas.
Up till now you women folk have been cast down
because of Eve,
but henceforth through Mary you are restored again to
sing glory.
As a result of the wicked act of your mother Eve were
you kept veiled,
but now through the Child of your sister Mary you
have been given freedom,
so uncover your faces to sing praise, without feeling
ashamed,
to Him who, by being born, caused you to acquire
freedom of speech.

Jacob ends his poem¹⁵ by comparing St Ephrem to

a sheepdog guarding the sheep of God's household,
building for them a sheepfold out of his poems and
hymns,
so that, within their safety, he might guard the sheep
from storms;

¹⁵P. 679.

at the same time he scatters, by means of his compelling
songs,
the heresies that rove around like wild animals outside.

It is attractive to suppose that when Jacob wrote these words he had in mind the various passages in St Ephrem's poems where the poet speaks of himself as one of the dogs waiting under the table to catch any crumbs that might fall (Matthew 15:27).

St Ephrem and Monasticism

In one of the few early depictions of St Ephrem, in an eleventh-century collection of Syriac homilies, he and Jacob of Serugh are depicted in monastic habit.¹⁶ As far as St Ephrem is concerned, such a depiction is anachronistic, for he was certainly never a monk in what later became the standard sense of the word. As we have already seen, Palladius appears to have been the first person to imply that Ephrem was a monk, and subsequent writers, notably Sozomen and the later lives, simply develop this idea. In fact, however, Ephrem probably only came across tributaries of Egyptian monasticism right at the end of his life during his last years at Edessa;¹⁷ he was certainly never a member of any such community. Rather, Ephrem will

¹⁶Illustrated in J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures*, II (Paris, 1964), plate 61.

¹⁷So E. Beck, "Ascétisme et monachisme chez saint Ephrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 3 (1958), pp. 273-98. A different view is taken by A. Vööbus, who accepts as genuine certain works which Beck (rightly) rejects as spurious: see, for example, his *History of Asceticism in the Syrian Orient*, II (CSCO 197 = Subsidia 17) pp. 70-110. Cf also S. P. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Rome, 1985) ch. 8.

have belonged to the native Syrian ascetic tradition which developed its own brand of what one might call "proto-monasticism." Central to this ascetic tradition was the ideal lying behind the term *iḥidaya*, a word covering a whole variety of different meanings, "single," "celibate," "single-minded," "simple" (in the sense of straightforward), and most importantly "a follower or imitator of Christ the *Iḥidaya* or "Only-Begotten." Only after Egyptian monasticism had reached north Syria and Mesopotamia in the last decades of the fourth century did the term *iḥidaya* come to take on the sense of *monachos*, or "monk," and sometimes also "solitary."

It would appear that by St Ephrem's time the term *iḥidaya* normally included two categories of people, the *bḥule*, "virgins," both men and women (in other words, celibates), and the *qaddishe*, or married people who had renounced marital intercourse. The latter term, literally meaning "holy" or "sanctified," had taken its origin from Exodus 19, verses 10 and 15. Together these groups constituted *qyama*, conventionally translated "covenant," and they were known as the "members (literally "children") of the covenant."¹⁸ Evidently they had undertaken certain ascetic vows at their baptism (which would still have usually been in adulthood), and they lived in small groups or communes serving the local church in a variety of different ways. It would seem that, unlike Egyptian monasticism, this Syrian proto-monasticism was essentially an urban or village phenomenon.

This ascetic ideal of virginity did not stem from dualist denigration of the "flesh," implying that it was inherently evil, but rather was based on three powerful conceptual models.

¹⁸Other meanings such as "pact," "promise," "stance," and "position" are also possible. A good survey is provided by G. Nedungatt, "The Convenanters of the early Syriac-speaking Church," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), pp. 191-215, 419-44.

First and foremost comes the idea of Christ as the Bridegroom, based on several New Testament parables, notably that of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25). From an early date the Church came to be described as the Bride of Christ, and in the liturgical texts of the Syriac Churches her betrothal to Christ is seen as taking place at Christ's baptism. An early hymn for Epiphany opens¹⁹:

My imagination wafted me to the Jordan
where I beheld a wonder
when the glorious Bridegroom was revealed
to make a marriage feast for the Bride and to
sanctify her.

The Semitic mentality of the biblical writers and of the Syriac poets, such as St Ephrem, finds it very easy to move from the collective to the individual, and from the individual to the collective. Thus Adam is regularly seen both as an individual and as humanity as a whole; this may even be found within the limits of a single short passage, as is the case in one of St Ephrem's Hymns on the Fast (II.4):

Blessed is He who put on Adam
and by means of the Wood of the Cross
made him leap back into Paradise.

By adopting this mode of thinking, it is easy to see how every individual member of the Church, as well as the Church as a collective, could be regarded as the Bride of Christ. In the New Testament parables the marriage feast

¹⁹Edited by E. Beck in CSCO 186 = *Scriptores Syri* 82, p. 217. The hymn is known to both East and West Syrian liturgical tradition and takes the form of a dialogue between John the Baptist and Christ; on it see "Dialogue hymns of the Syriac Churches," *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1983), pp. 35-45, and *Le Muséon* 97 (1984), pp. 44-5.

and the bridal chamber (*gnona*)²⁰ belong to the eschaton and the second coming; in the life of the Church, however, this second coming can also be understood as being anticipated (as it were) in Christ's presence in the Eucharist, and it is in this context that St Ephrem juxtaposes the idea of the individual soul and the collective Church as brides of Christ:²¹

The soul is Your bride, the body Your bridal chamber,
Your guests are the senses and the thoughts.
And if a single body is a wedding feast for You,
how great is Your banquet for the whole Church!

Here, with deliberate paradox, the poet speaks of Christ the Bridegroom entering the bridal chamber of the body, where the bride, the soul, is already residing—a remarkable illustration of the very positive attitude of St Ephrem toward the body. Here of course the imagery has been interiorized, but it is clear that behind the ideal of virginity lay a more literalist interpretation which regarded any marital union as an adulterous breaking of the promise of betrothal to Christ, seen originally as having been made at baptism. In St Ephrem's elder contemporary, Aphrahat "the Persian Sage," we encounter a remarkable interpretation of Genesis 2:24 which provides a rationale for such a view²²: commenting on the words "Therefore a man leaves

²⁰The New Testament basis for the term is provided by Matthew 25:10 (although the extant Syriac translations use a different word, early writers regularly quote the verse using the term *gnōnā*, e.g. Aphrahat, *Demonstration* VI.1). Cf. also *The Luminous Eye*, chs. 3, 8.

²¹Hymns on Faith XIV.5 (English translation in *The Harp of the Spirit*, no. 1; in the second edition half the first line has unfortunately fallen out).

²²*Demonstration* XVIII.10. One might compare the allegorical interpretation given by Philo of Alexandria, *On the Allegorical Laws* II.491, where the man represents the *nous* or intellect, the

his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife," Aphrahat asks "What father and mother does he leave when he takes a wife? The sense is this: as long as a man has not yet taken a wife, he loves and honors God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother; but when a person takes a wife, he leaves his Father and Mother—in the sense indicated just now—and his mind is caught up with this world, and his mind, heart and thought are drawn away from God to the world."

It seems clear that in certain circles of the early Syrian Church the view was held that only the "single"—whether *bthule*, "virgins," or married *qaddishe*—could enter the eschatological Bridal Chamber. Such an attitude is above all reflected in the early encratite work known as the Acts of Thomas.²³

father and mother divine Wisdom and Virtue, and the wife sensuality. Ephrem, however, gives a quite different interpretation to this verse in his Commentary on Genesis.

²³In section 12, for example, Thomas urges a newly wed couple to abstain from marital union in the following words: "Realize that as soon as you preserve yourselves from this filthy intercourse, you will become pure temples. . . . You will wait in hope for the true Wedding Feast . . . and you will be numbered with those who enter the Bridal Chamber." The Acts of Thomas are usually dated to the third century: they were written in Syriac, but an early Greek translation also survives. Very much the same idea is to be found in the second-century Gospel of Thomas, Logion 75: "Many are standing at the door, but 'the single' [*monachoi*] are the ones who will enter the Bridal Chamber"; *monachos* is of course used here in its pre-monastic sense of "single, celibate" (a good discussion of the development of the term will be found in F. Morard, "Monachos, Moine: histoire du terme grec jusqu'au IV^e siècle," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 20 (1973), pp. 332-411). It should be stressed that both Aphrahat and Ephrem have a more balanced view of the role of marriage than that found in the Acts of Thomas. The imagery of the Bridal Chamber (very popular in Ephrem) is found in many Greek writers as well, e.g. *Saint John Climacus, The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline, 1978), Step 2.9, "No one will

The parable which provides the starting point for much of this imagery, that of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, also introduces a second motif that is of great importance, that of "wakefulness." Early Syriac writers generally follow the usage of the author of the Book of Daniel and refer to angelic beings as "Wakers" or "Watchers," and so to the Syriac reader the wise virgins in the parable are associated with a characteristic of the angelic life, and it is precisely the marriageless nature of the angelic life that provides further motivation for the ideal of virginity. Here a key passage is to be found in St Luke's Gospel; he, alone of the three Evangelists who record this dominical saying, speaks of the marriageless life of angels as something to be anticipated already on earth. The Old Syriac Gospels, translated below, make this idea even more prominent than does the original Greek text (Luke 20:35-6):

Those who have become worthy to receive that world [the Kingdom] and that Resurrection from the dead do not marry, nor can they die, for they have been made equal with the angels.

That the ascetic life is an angelic life, *angelikos bios*, was to become a commonplace in subsequent monastic literature. Here, however, only one further facet of this particular ideal may be noted: Aphrahat associates the need to become an "alien," a "stranger" to the world,²⁴ both with the angelic life and with the imitation of Christ (the significance of this aspect will emerge later).

The third basis lying behind the ideal of virginity rested on the theme of St Ephrem's hymn cycle translated in this

enter the Heavenly bride chamber wearing a crown unless he makes the first, second and third renunciation."

²⁴*Demonstration VI.1* (English translation in *Select Library of Nicene Fathers*, series II, vol. 13; the title, "On the members of the Covenant," is there misleadingly translated "On monks").

book, the Paradise narrative. Baptism is regularly understood by the early Syriac Fathers (and of course many others) as a re-entry into Paradise,²⁵ an eschatological Paradise even more glorious than the primordial Paradise of the Genesis narrative. Now these writers were quick to observe that, according to the biblical text, Adam and Eve had marital intercourse only after their expulsion from Paradise (Genesis 4:1); they therefore deduced that sexual abstinence was a characteristic of marital life in Paradise and therefore also among members of the Church, which ideally anticipates the eschatological Paradise.

Adam's "singleness" in Paradise in fact brings us back to the starting point of this diversion from our discussion of the ideal of the *ihidaya*, for there is evidence, both in Jewish and in Christian sources, that Adam himself was sometimes described as being *ihidaya*. In Genesis 3:22, where the Hebrew text (followed by the Septuagint and Peshitta) has "Behold, Adam has become²⁶ like one of us, knowing good and evil," the Palestinian Targum tradition introduces the term *ihidaya*, using it both of Adam and of God: "Behold, the first Adam whom I created is single [*ihiday*] in the world, just as I am single [*ihiday*] in the heights of heaven." Although the term *ihidaya* does not appear in the Syriac translation of Genesis 1-3, it is an epithet applied to Adam in the Wisdom of Solomon 10:1: "It was Wisdom which preserved the ancestral father, the *ihidaya* ["single" or "unique"], who had been created in the world."

Although it is unlikely in the extreme that St Ephrem knew the Palestinian Targum directly, it is quite possible that he was aware of this strand of Jewish exegesis, whose

²⁵This idea is expressed most notably in the imagery of the Robe of Glory, lost at the Fall and regained at Baptism (see below).

²⁶The Hebrew and the Syriac Peshitta could also be understood in the sense "Adam was . . ."

importance lay in the association of the "singleness" of Adam with the singleness of God, using precisely the term *ihidaya*, so central to Syriac "proto-monasticism." Now in the Syriac New Testament the term *Monogenes*, "Only-Begotten," is regularly translated as *ihida* or *ihidaya*, and so we have exactly the same term employed in Syriac and in Jewish Aramaic for both God and man. Clearly, then, among the various associations behind the Syriac term *ihidaya* used of those living an ascetic life, that of follower of Christ the *Ihidaya* par excellence will be very prominent. Indeed, to a Syriac speaker, the individual *ihidaya* will be to Christ (the *Ihidaya*) what the individual Christian (*mshihaya*) is to Christ (*Mshiha*). This is brought out in one of the Epiphany hymns (VIII.16) attributed to St Ephrem:

See, people being baptized and becoming "virgins"
and *qaddishe*, having gone down to the font, have
been baptized in it and put on the single *Ihidaya*,

based on St Paul's metaphor of "putting on Christ" at baptism (Galatians 3:27).

Putting on Christ the *Ihidaya*, and becoming an *ihidaya* oneself, was seen not just as an outward adoption of the name, but as a radical reorientation of one's life involving the "putting on," the imitation, of the whole of Christ's own life: in order to share in His resurrection it is necessary to participate in His sufferings as well. Thus the Christian life is inevitably one of "afflictions," which will take on quite different forms with different individuals; but at the same time, as Aphrahat says,²⁷ "the *Ihidaya* from the bosom of His Father gives joy to all *ihidaye*."

With all this in mind we can begin to see that the key term, *ihidaya*, lying behind the early Syriac ascetic ideal

²⁷ *Demonstration* VI.6.

to which St Ephrem witnesses, was exceedingly rich in its connotations (and for that reason I have frequently left it untranslated in the discussion above): "single, celibate, singular, single-minded, follower of Christ the *Ihidaya* (Only-Begotten)." It is extremely likely that St Ephrem himself was an *ihidaya*; in any case, it is with the proto-monasticism centered on the ideals lying behind this term, rather than with the Egyptian monasticism which eventually spread to Syria, that St Ephrem should be associated. No doubt the various resonances that lie behind this term are reflected in the following final stanza to a hymn on Prayer and Faith, where St Ephrem is clearly alluding to himself (Hymns on Faith, XX.17):

Let prayer within wipe clean the murky thoughts,
let faith wipe clean the senses outwardly,
and let one such man who is divided
collect himself together and become one before You.

St Ephrem's Writings

St Ephrem was a prolific writer²⁸; over four hundred of his hymns come down to us, and quite a number more are known to have existed once but are now lost. He was also the author of verse homilies and several prose works; the latter include both treatises against various heretical writers and biblical commentaries. Whereas the polemical works are today chiefly of antiquarian interest, the commentaries contain many profound insights; of the extant Old Testament commentaries that on Genesis is the most important, and since this provides a helpful backdrop to *The Hymns on Paradise*, a translation of the section covering Genesis

²⁸For a list of St Ephrem's main writings, see the Bibliographical Note.

2-3 is provided at the end of the translation of the hymn cycle. Most accessible (in every sense of the word) of Ephrem's commentaries is that on the Diatessaron, or Harmony of the Four Gospels; until recently this was only known in an early Armenian translation, but in 1956 the Syriac original of at least part of the work was rediscovered, and subsequently a French translation of the entire commentary (which contains several passages of great lyrical beauty) has become available in *Sources Chrétiennes* (no. 121). The other New Testament commentaries, on the Acts of the Apostles and on the Pauline Epistles, survive only in Armenian translation (a situation which also applies to some of the hymns and verse homilies). Standing halfway between the prose and the poetry come two works in artistic prose, one a comparatively extensive work entitled "On Our Lord," the other, in the form of a letter addressed to a certain Publius, being a meditation, of considerable profundity, on the Last Judgment.

St Ephrem's reputation as a writer was very great both in the Syriac and in the Graeco-Latin world. Anonymous and spurious works, however, have a strong tendency to become attached to famous names, and it is now known that a large number of works attributed to St Ephrem are certainly not by him, and nowhere does this apply so much as to the body of writings in Greek and Latin which are transmitted under his name. Between the definitely genuine and the definitely spurious comes a rather large number of works, especially verse homilies (*memre*), whose status is at present doubtful or disputed.

Most important among the clearly genuine writings are the great hymn cycles, such as the Paradise hymns translated here. It is upon these lyric poems (*madrashe*), with their highly imaginative use of imagery and great sensitivity and artistry in the use of language as well as the profundity of their thought, that St Ephrem's reputation as a poet of outstanding stature stands.

These cycles, of varying extent, reach us in a number of sixth-century manuscripts under titles which often refer only to a small group (usually the first) within that cycle. Thus, for example, only the first half of the Nisibene hymns have anything to do with the town of Nisibis; the remainder almost all have to do with the theme of Christ's descent into the underworld Sheol. The most extensive of these cycles are entitled On Faith (with 87 hymns), On Nisibis (77 hymns), Against Heresies (56 hymns), On Virginity (52 hymns), On the Church (52 hymns), and On the Nativity (28 hymns); smaller cycles include On Paradise (15 hymns), On Lent (10 hymns) and On the Paschal Season (three separate groups, in all 35 hymns). The collection of the hymns into these cycles must go back at least to the late fifth century, but whether they represent Ephrem's own arrangement or not is uncertain: this may well be the case with the smaller collections, such as that on Paradise,²⁹ but is much less likely with larger cycles.

Later on, especially from the eighth and ninth centuries onward, copyists tended to abbreviate the hymns; about this time, too, selections were made from Ephrem's hymns for inclusion in the vast festal hymnaries designed to cover the whole ecclesiastical year. The compilers of these would frequently reduce the number of stanzas of a hymn which they chose to include, and over the years this process of reduction would be continued by copyists with the sad result (reflected in the printed editions) that the train of thought is sometimes seriously distorted.³⁰

²⁹One of the three sixth-century manuscripts containing this cycle states that the cycle finishes at the end of XII.15 (evidently incorrectly). Hymns XIII and XIV form an alphabetic acrostic.

³⁰In contrast to the extensive use made of some hymn cycles (notably those on the Nativity and Pascha) in the seven-volume Mosul edition of the *Fenqitho* (1886-96), the Paradise hymns are hardly used at all: a single stanza, VI.19, is incorporated into a *madrasha* in Vol. VI, p. 638, and the opening of hymn X appears

We know from an index of St Ephrem's hymns preserved in a sixth- or seventh-century manuscript in the Monastery of St Catherine on Mount Sinai that there were once in circulation considerably more of St Ephrem's hymns than today survive, though a few of these poems are available at one remove, in Armenian translation.

Translations of Ephrem's works into Greek (and probably also Latin) were already being made at an early date, as we learn from both Jerome and Sozomen. It so happens that there comes down to us a vast number of texts in Greek, Slavonic and Latin which are attributed to St Ephrem, but of these only a small proportion can lay any claim to being genuine, and in many cases they are not even translations from Syriac at all. This, however, is an area where a great deal of sorting and critical analysis still remains to be done. The same also applies to the extensive translations of works attributed to Ephrem into oriental languages, above all Arabic.

Poetic Form

St Ephrem's poetry falls into two different categories, the *memre* or verse homilies, written in couplets of 7+7 syllables, and the *madrache* or hymns in stanza form, where all the stanzas of a particular hymn will be constructed on a single syllabic pattern chosen out of the great many syllabic patterns available. As far as we can tell Syriac poetry was from the first based on syllabic principles, and this certainly applies both to an excerpt quoted by Mara, son of Serapion, who may be a late first-century pagan writer, and to the two archaic poems, both in six-syllable couplets, incorporated into the Acts of Thomas, the Hymn

to have served as the model for another *madrasha*, in vol. III, p. 359.

of the Bride of Light and the Hymn of the Pearl. We know from Ephrem's own hymns that both Bardaisan (who died in 222) and Mani (who died in c. 276) already wrote *madrashe*,³¹ but even without this information, the extremely sophisticated use of the *madrasa* verse form exemplified in St Ephrem's poetry would require us to postulate a long prehistory for this genre.

In Sozomen's and Theodoret's notices of Ephrem's life, however, we have seen that quite a different picture is given: according to Sozomen, Syriac verse form was an innovation, inspired by Greek models, made by Harmonius, a reputed son of Bardaisan. This picture fails to ring true for two main reasons: first, Syriac syllabic verse form was certainly already in existence before the time of Harmonius (whose very existence is in fact a matter of some doubt); second, if syllabic verse form had been taken over by Harmonius from Greek, it would have been at a time when syllabic verse (as opposed to classical quantitative verse) was only just making its first appearances in the Greek world—definitely before it had had time to gain sufficient prestige to warrant its wholesale transfer to another linguistic milieu. What, then, are we to make of Sozomen's claim? It would appear that both he and Theodoret simply witness to the general lack of appreciation, common among Greek writers in antiquity, of the culture of "barbarian" (non-Greek) nations. Sozomen and Theodoret, faced with the undisputed prestige of Ephrem as a Syriac poet, deduced that "barbarian" Syriac could only have achieved such heights of poetic excellence under the influence and inspiration of Greek models.

In his *madrashe*, which form the major part of his

³¹Hymns against Heresies I.16 (Mani) and LIII.5 (Bardaisan). Relics of Manichaean hymnography survive in Coptic (edited by C. R. C. Allberry) and in various Iranian dialects (edited by M. Boyce).

poetic output, St Ephrem employs some fifty or so different stanza patterns, ranging from the very simple (such as 5+4+5+4 syllables) to the highly complex. As the *madrashē* were sung, the manuscripts transmitting them normally give the title of their melody, called the *qala*, consisting of the first words of a particular *madrasha* using that stanza pattern. In several cases we have more than one *qala* attested for a single stanza pattern, but this does not necessarily imply that there were several different melodies. Since Syriac scribes (apart from a few Melkite scribes on Mt Sinai) never adopted any notational system for writing down the music, the original melodies to which the *madrashē* were sung are lost.

Whereas most hymn cycles exhibit a whole variety of different stanza patterns, that on Paradise employ only one, with a *qala* which was later regularly entitled *Pardaisā*, after the cycle.³² The syllabic pattern for each stanza is as follows: 5+5. 5+5. 5+5. 7. 5+5. 5+5. Rhyme is never present except for special effect (and this is only rare). Whether there was also a regular stress pattern, corresponding to the homotony of the Byzantine kontakion, as well as the syllabic pattern, is very uncertain. A transcription of a single stanza (I.4) will illustrate the syllabic structure of Ephrem's verse:

b-aynā d-re'yānā hzītheh l-pardaysā
w-rawmē d-kull tūrīn sīmīn thēt rawmeh
l-'eqbaw mtā balhud rīsheh d-māmōlā

³²In the manuscripts of Ephrem's own hymn cycles this particular stanza pattern is actually given five different *qālā* titles; most manuscripts of the Paradise cycle name the *qālā* as *dīnā d-sharbāthā*, rather than *pardaisā*. In some other of Ephrem's hymns employing the same metrical pattern the *qālā* title is given as *bayya b-mulkānē*, the opening words of the seventh of the Hymns on Paradise (thus Hymns on Faith XXXI, XXXIX-XLVIII; Nativity III; Nisibene Hymns II-III, XLIII-XLIX).

l-reglaw nshaq wa-sged w-ethpnī
d-nessaq ndush rīshā d-tūrē w-rāmāthā.
'eqbaw d-haw nāsheq w-rīshā d-kull qāphah.

A literal translation of this would be:

with-the-eye of-the-mind I-beheld Paradise
 and-the-heights of-all mountains
 are-placed beneath its-height.
 To-its-heels there-reached alone
 the-summit of-the-flood,
 its-feet did-it-kiss and-worship and-turn-back
 in-order-to-go-up (and) trample the-summit
 of-mountains and-hills:
 the-heels of-the-former does-it-kiss
 and-the-summit of-everything (else) does-it-buffet.

St Ephrem's Theological Vision

St Ephrem's poetry is profoundly theological in character, expressing his awareness of the sacramental character of the created world, and of the potential of everything in the created world to act as a witness and pointer to the Creator. Everything is imbued with significance, but, although this meaning is objectively present (St Ephrem calls it "the hidden power," or "meaning," *ḥayla kasya*), it requires the eye of faith on the part of each individual to penetrate both inward and beyond the outer material reality in order to perceive the relationship, sacramental in character, between the exterior physical and interior spiritual realm. By positing this inherent link between the material and spiritual worlds St Ephrem is thus very far removed from those Christian writers who, usually under Neoplatonic influence, tend to denigrate the value of the material world.

Since it is inevitable that any human perception of this "hidden power," this objective spiritual reality, will be of a subjective character, varying from individual to individual, poetry proves a far more satisfactory vehicle for expressing this experience than does prose, for poetry is able to preserve a fluidity and dynamism which eschews the use of all definitions, seeing that these, by their inherently static character, are apt to have a fossilizing effect on any theological enquiry.

St Ephrem's mode of theological discussion, essentially Biblical and Semitic in character, thus stands in sharp contrast to the dogmatizing approach which, under the influence of Hellenic philosophy, has characterized much of the Christian theology with which we are today familiar. Indeed it is precisely because Ephrem's theology is not tied to a particular cultural or philosophical background, but rather operates by means of imagery and symbolism which are basic to all human experience, that his theological vision, as expressed in his hymns, has a freshness and immediacy today that few other theological works from the early Christian period can hope to achieve.

The difference between these two approaches, Hellenic and Semitic, can be well illustrated if one visualizes a circle with a point in the center, where the point represents the object of theological enquiry; the philosophical tradition of theology will seek to define, to set *horoi*, "boundaries" or "definitions," to this central point, whereas St Ephrem's Semitic approach through his poetry will provide a series of paradoxical statements situated as it were at opposite points on the circumference of the circle: the central point is left undefined, but something of its nature can be inferred by joining up the various opposite points around the circumference. St Ephrem is always very insistent that, since the center point representing the aspect of God's being under discussion stands outside creation, it thus lies beyond the ability of the created intellect to comprehend—and any

claim to be able to do so is blasphemous. In all this St Ephrem is obviously very much in harmony with the apophatic tradition of later Greek theology.

The ontological gap between God the Creator and his creation is in fact impassable as far as any created being is concerned, and any knowledge of, or statement about, God would be impossible had not God himself taken the initiative and bridged this chasm. He does this by a variety of different means, each manifesting something of his hiddenness. The mode of his self-revelation is essentially threefold: by means of types and symbols which are operative in both Nature and in Scripture, by allowing Himself—the indescribable—to be described in Scripture in human terms and language, and then, supremely, by actually becoming part of the created world, at the Incarnation.

Types and Symbols

On a number of occasions St Ephrem speaks of the natural world and the Bible as God's two witnesses; in the Paradise hymns (V.2) we have the following statement:

In his book Moses described
the creation of the natural world,
so that both Nature and Scripture
might bear witness to the Creator:
Nature, through man's use of it,
Scripture, through his reading it;
they are the witnesses
which reach everywhere,
they are to be found at all times,
present at every hour,
confuting the unbeliever
who defames the Creator.

Nature and Scripture testify to God by means of the symbols and types which they contain, for these act as pointers to spiritual reality or "truth" (*shrara*). St Ephrem uses a variety of different terms more or less interchangeably, but the most important of these is *raza*, "mystery" (but often best translated "symbol"). The word, of Persian origin, first appears in Daniel where its primary meaning is that of "secret"; subsequently it occurs in the texts of the Qumran community, and very probably it is the Semitic term lying behind St Paul's use of the word *mysterion*. By St Ephrem's time *raza* had taken on a wide variety of different connotations, and in the present context it is significant that the plural, *raze*, like the Greek *mysteria*, refers to the liturgical "Mysteries." As a typological term *raza*, "symbol," indicates the connection between two different modes of reality, and here it is important to remember that the Fathers employ the term "symbol" in a strong sense, quite different from that of modern usage: for them a symbol actually participates in some sense with the spiritual reality it symbolizes, whereas for most people today the term "symbol" tends to imply something essentially different from the thing it symbolizes. The Patristic view, of course, accords much greater significance to the symbol, whereas modern usage plays down the value of the symbol. Clearly this difference greatly affects St Ephrem's attitude toward the material world.

Types and symbols are a means of expressing relationships and connections, of instilling meaning into everything. They operate in several different ways, between the Old Testament and the New, between this world and the heavenly, between the New Testament and the Sacraments, between the Sacraments and the eschaton. In every case they "reveal" something of what is otherwise "hidden."

The dynamic tension implied behind St Ephrem's use of these two terms, "hidden" and "revealed," is of great importance in the structure of his thought, and his handling

of it can at times be quite complex. Basically, the opposition between these two poles can be seen to operate in two different ways. On what we may call the objective plane, "hiddenness" (*kasyutha*) is something characteristic of the *raze*, both in the sense of "symbols" (whether in Nature or in Scripture) and in the sense of "Sacraments"; in the former case these symbols represent a hidden state of what is to be revealed in Christ, whose Incarnation provides the key to unlocking the treasure-store of symbols; in the latter case, the Sacraments represent in a hidden way what will be fully revealed at the end of time in Paradise. In both cases what is revealed (*galyutha*) represents an objective reality, but one which can only be experienced in this life in a subjective and hidden way.

The second way of looking at this opposition between "hidden" and "revealed" is to begin from the subjective viewpoint of humanity. Under this schema the term *kasyutha*, "hiddenness," refers to God, knowledge of whom would have been totally inaccessible to created human beings had he not first revealed aspects of himself to his creation. Thus, within time, the reality of the Incarnation is hidden as far as the Old Testament writers are concerned, and the glimpses they have of this reality, expressed as *raze* or "symbols" in the Biblical writings of the Old Covenant, have been made possible for them only because God has "revealed" Himself in some respect there. Likewise, in the Sacraments God has revealed something of a hidden objective reality which will only be fully revealed outside time and space, in Paradise.

It is significant that when St Ephrem is employing this second, subjective way of looking at things, he does not use the abstract noun *galyutha* to denote what is revealed, but the plural *galyatha*, "things revealed," thus emphasizing that he is only talking about a partial revelation. In the hands of his poetic genius the interplay between these two

ways of using the terms "hidden" and "revealed" can often be highly subtle.

It will be found that throughout all his works St Ephrem lays a great deal of emphasis on the hiddenness of God. The reason for this is not hard to discern, for St Ephrem was living at a time when Arianism in its various forms was posing a serious threat to the Orthodox Church. The Arians, by locating the Generation of the Son in time, not only placed the Logos in a position subordinate to the Father, but also situated him on our side, as it were, of the ontological gap between created and Creator. And if the Logos is part of creation, then everything about Him could potentially be grasped and described by the human intellect, a fellow child of creation. To St Ephrem and to the Orthodox this was of course a double blasphemy, and it is against the logical consequence of the initial assumption that St Ephrem is constantly at pains to argue. Since for him the eternal Generation of the Son from the Father lay outside time, and belonged to the far side of the ontological chasm between created and Creator, then any attempt to use the created intellect in order to try to penetrate the "hiddenness" of this mystery was both presumptuous and totally misguided.

St Ephrem's recurring polemic against the misuse of the human intellect in matters of theology can give the initial impression that he is anti-intellectual in his approach; this, however, is far from the case, for the intellect is to him an extremely important gift of God to humanity, but, if it is to be used properly, it must not vainly seek to understand things which lie beyond its comprehension. In other words, the area of the intellect's activity necessarily lies within the created world—where indeed there is ample scope for it. The matter is put succinctly in one of the hymns on Faith (VIII.9).

There *is* intellectual enquiry in the Church,
investigating what is revealed:
the intellect was *not* intended to pry into hidden things.

The Garment of Words

Since the human mind is part of creation, it is **unable** of its own accord to leap across this gap between created and Creator and to provide any description at all of the hidden Godhead. No theology, talking about God, would in fact be possible at all but for God's own initiative and condescension: stirred by love for humanity, the culmination of His creative activity, He Himself has crossed this gap and allowed Himself to be described in human language and in human terms in the Scriptures as part of the process of His self-revelation. God thus "put on names"—the metaphors used of him in the Bible—and in this way the human intellect is provided with a whole variety of pointers upward, hinting at various aspects of the hiddenness of God, whose true nature, however, cannot possibly be described by, or contained in, human language.

This "incarnation" of God into human language is perhaps most fully described by St Ephrem in the thirty-first hymn in the collection *On Faith*, whose opening five stanzas are worth quoting in full:

1. Let us give thanks to God
 who clothed Himself in the names of the body's
 various parts:
Scriptures refers to His "ears"
 to teach us that He listens to us;
it speaks of His "eyes,"
 to show that He sees us.
It was just the names of such things
 that He put on,

and—although in His true being
there is no wrath or regret—
yet He put on these names
because of our weakness.

Response: Blessed is He who has appeared to our
human race under so many metaphors.

2. We should realize that,
had He not put on the names
of such things,
it would not have been possible for Him
to speak with us humans.
By means of what belongs to us did He draw
close to us:
He clothed Himself in language,
so that He might clothe us
in His mode of life.
He asked for our form and put this on,
and then, as a father with his children,
He spoke with our childish state.
3. It is our metaphors that He put on—
though He did not literally do so;
He then took them off—without actually doing so:
when wearing them, He was at the same time
stripped of them.
He puts on one when it is beneficial,
then strips it off in exchange for another;
the fact that He strips off
and puts on all sorts of metaphors
tells us that the metaphor
does not apply to His true Being:
because that Being is hidden,
He has depicted it by means of what is visible.

4. In one place He was like an Old Man
and the Ancient of Days,
then again, He became like a Hero,
a valiant Warrior.
For the purposes of judgment He was an Old Man,
but for conflict He was Valiant.
In one place He was delaying;
elsewhere, having run,
He became weary.
In one place He was asleep,
in another, in need:
by every means did He weary Himself so as to
gain us.
5. For this is the Good One,
who could have forced us to please Him,
without any trouble to Himself;
but instead He toiled by every means
so that we might act pleasingly to Him of our own
free will,
that we might depict our beauty
with the colors
that our own free will had gathered;
whereas, if He had adorned us,
then we would have resembled
a portrait that someone else had painted,
adorning it with his own colors.

(St Ephrem humorously goes on to compare God's action in teaching humanity about Himself to that of someone who tries to teach a parrot to talk, with the help of a mirror.)

St Ephrem stresses that we, on our part, must not abuse God's condescension by taking these metaphors literally—that would be to misunderstand Biblical language totally. Any purely literal interpretation of Scripture is therefore to

be rejected, and this is a point to which Ephrem returns on a number of occasions, but perhaps most forcefully in stanzas 6 and 7 of the eleventh hymn on Paradise:

If someone concentrates his attention solely
on the metaphors used of God's majesty,
he abuses and misrepresents that majesty,
and thus errs
by means of those metaphors
with which God had clothed Himself for his benefit,
and he is ungrateful to that Grace
which stooped low
to the level of his childishness:
although it has nothing in common with him,
yet Grace clothed itself in his likeness
in order to bring him to the likeness of itself.

Do not let your intellect
be disturbed by mere names,
for Paradise has simply clothed itself
in terms that are akin to you;
it is not because it is impoverished
that it put on your imagery;
rather, your nature is far too weak
to be able
to attain to its greatness,
and its beauties are much diminished
by being depicted in the pale colors
with which you are familiar.

There exists, in Ephrem's thought, an important parallelism between God's two "incarnations," his "putting on metaphors" and his "putting on the body": in both cases it is essential to penetrate beyond what is seen outwardly—the literal meaning of the Biblical text and the humanity of Christ—in order to reach any proper understanding of

the significance of these two "incarnations." Just as, by concentrating solely on the humanity of Christ, one would fail to perceive anything of His divinity, so too, by fixing one's sole attention on the literal meaning of the Biblical text, one will remain blind to its inner, spiritual, meaning.³³ Conversely, a total disregard for the literal meaning of the text would itself also lead one to an unbalanced view of Scripture, just as any failure to take account of the humanity of Christ would result in a completely misguided view of Christology. Any true understanding of Scripture accordingly needs to preserve a proper balance: the literal meaning of the Biblical text has its own validity, but at the same time the text has an inner meaning (the "hidden power" in Ephrem's terminology) which belongs to a different mode of reality.

St Ephrem's Concept of Paradise

A literal reading of the Biblical text would leave one with the impression that Paradise is a concept which belongs only to the beginnings of creation. In the religious climate of the centuries at the turn of the Christian era, however, a much richer understanding of Paradise had grown up within Judaism, finding expression in apocalyptic works such as the First Book on Enoch (perhaps of the second century BC); in these writings Paradise is understood as representing both the primordial and the eschatological state at the end of time, for it has now also become the abode of the righteous.³⁴

³³This analogy between the two "incarnations" incidentally helps to explain why the Fathers frequently speak of a purely literal understanding of Scripture as a Jewish characteristic.

³⁴Enoch 61:12; a similar idea is found in the Jewish Palestinian Targum tradition at Genesis 3:24: "He drove out Adam. Now He had caused the Glory of His Shekhina (Divine Presence) to dwell above the Garden of Eden from the very beginning, between

The location of this Paradise (envisaged, as we shall see, as a mountain) was variously expressed. Some writers, taking Genesis 2:8 ("And the Lord God planted a garden—Paradise in the Septuagint—in Eden, in the East") as their cue, held it to be on the eastern extremities of this earth, while according to others Paradise represented the eschatological transfiguration of the Promised Land, where the Paradise mountain was equated with the new Jerusalem, situated on Mount Sion. More significant, from the point of view of St Ephrem's conception of Paradise, is an interpretation given to Genesis 2:8 which is to be found both in the Peshitta, the Syriac translation of the Bible, and in the Targumim, the Jewish Aramaic versions which often reflect current exegesis in synagogue circles: whereas the Septuagint (followed by all the standard modern translations) renders the Hebrew *miqqedem* as "to the East," the Peshitta and the two Targum traditions, Palestinian and Babylonian, take the word as having temporal, rather than spatial, reference, "from the beginning," that is, belonging to primordial or sacred time. This is made clearest in Targum pseudo-Jonathan, which, although it belongs to the early Islamic period in its present form, nevertheless contains some old traditions. Here the verse is expanded so as to include the eschatological role of Paradise:

A garden had been planted in Eden for the just by the Word of the Lord God before the creation of the world, and He made Adam reside there once He had created him.

It was to views of this sort that early Christian writers were heirs, and, just as there was evidently a considerable

the Cherubim. . . . He created the Law and established the Garden of Eden for the righteous, so that they might eat from it and enjoy its fruits, seeing that they had kept the commandments of the Law in this world" (Fragment Targum).

variety of opinions floating around within Judaism, so too a number of different conceptual pictures of Paradise are to be found in Christian writers. Some locate the Paradise of Genesis on earth and regard it as a place different from the eschatological Paradise, to which they accord only an intermediary role, a stepping stone as it were, for the souls of the just awaiting the Resurrection at the end of time. This view, found in a variety of different forms, makes a sharp functional distinction between Paradise and the Kingdom of Heaven, and it claimed to find support for this in Luke 23:43, where the penitent thief is told by Christ, "This day you shall be with me in Paradise."

Quite a different view, clearly rooted in late Judaism, held the primordial and eschatological Paradise to be the same, and to represent the definitive place of beatitude after the final Resurrection. In an unsophisticated form such a Paradise could be located on this earth, but among more thoughtful writers (among whom are both St Ephrem and St Gregory of Nyssa) this Paradise was not to be situated in time or space; rather, it belonged to a different order of reality.

With these preliminaries we may now turn to the details of St Ephrem's understanding of Paradise.

St Ephrem, like Dante many centuries later, envisaged Paradise as a mountain. Although the Genesis narrative itself has nothing to suggest this, there are hints elsewhere in the Old Testament which point to such a conception, notably in Ezekiel 28:13-14, where "Eden, the Garden [Paradise] of God" is described as "the holy mountain of God." The prophet makes use here of an idea, well attested throughout the ancient Near East, of a cosmic mountain upon which the deity resided (elsewhere in the Old Testament this holy mountain is sometimes identified with Sion, as in Psalm 47(48):1-2). Jewish literature of the inter-testamental period indicates that by that time the concept of Paradise as a mountain was a widespread one. As a

matter of fact a hint of it is even introduced into the Syriac translation of Genesis 4:8, where Cain says to Abel "Let us go to the *valley*" (Septuagint and other versions have "plain" or "field"): in his Commentary on Genesis St Ephrem deduces from this that they were still at that time on higher ground, in other words the foothills of the Paradise mountain from which their parents had been expelled.³⁵

Since early Syriac Christianity clearly had many direct and indirect links with contemporary Judaism, it is no surprise that St Ephrem should have taken over this particular concept of Paradise as well.

The Paradise Hymns provide us with a number of topographical details which, taken together, can give us some idea of how St Ephrem conceptualized this Paradisiacal mountain. We learn that the mountain is circular (I.8) and that it encircles the "Great Sea" (II.6), enclosing both land and sea (I.8-9). The Flood reached only its foothills (I.4), and on these foothills is situated the "fence" or "barrier" (*syaga*), guarded by the Cherub with the revolving sword (II.7, IV.1, based on Genesis 3:24). This fence demarcates the lowest extremity of Paradise. Halfway up is the Tree of Knowledge which provides an internal boundary beyond and higher than which Adam and Eve were forbidden to go (III.3); this Tree acts as a sanctuary curtain hiding the Holy of Holies, which is the Tree of Life higher up (III.2). On the summit of the mountain resides the Divine Presence, the Shekhina (Syriac *shkinta*).

This Paradise mountain is also understood as consisting of three concentric circles which divide the mountain up

³⁵Commentary on Genesis III.5: "From the fact that he said, 'Let us travel to the valley,' it can be deduced that either they were living on the lower mountain slopes of Paradise, and that he led him down to the valley; or that Abel was shepherding his sheep on the mountain, and Cain went up to bring him down to the valley." Compare R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, Cambridge 1975), pp. 306-10.

into three separate levels, reserved for different categories of the blessed. These levels at the same time correspond to the various levels in the Ark and on Mount Sinai (II.10-13).

The Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life are, as we have already seen, described respectively as the "sanctuary curtain or veil" (III.5, 13, compare XV.8; Syriac *appay tar'a*) and the "inner sanctuary" or "Holy of Holies" (III.5, 14; Syriac *qdush qudshe*); in other words, Paradise also represents both the Temple and its Christian successor, the Church (St Ephrem would have put it the other way around: the Old Testament Temple and the Christian Church here on earth are both pale reflections of Paradise). This is not all, for the threefold structure of the human person (IX.20), consisting of intellectual spirit (*tar'itha*), soul (*naphsha*) and body (*gushma*), also reflects the divisions of Paradise. Drawing all this together we can outline St Ephrem's conception of Paradise as follows in diagrammatic form:

	<i>Paradise</i>	<i>Ark</i>	<i>Sinai</i>	<i>Human person</i>
summit: (<i>risha</i>)	Shekhina		the Glorious One	divinity
	Tree of Life (Holy of Holies)			
heights: (<i>rawma</i>)	the glorious (<i>nassihe</i>)	Noah	Moses	intellectual spirit
	Tree of Knowledge (Sanctuary Veil)			
slopes (<i>gabbe</i>)	the just (<i>zaddiqe</i>)	birds	Aaron	soul
	the Fence (<i>syaga</i>)		priests	
lower slopes: (<i>shphule</i>)	the repentant (<i>tayyabe</i>)	animals	people	body

It would appear, then, that St Ephrem visualized Paradise as a conically shaped mountain whose base circumference encircles the "Great Sea," or Okeanos, which itself was thought to surround the earth. Our sky will thus be formed by the inside of the conical mountain of Paradise, a concept very similar to that described by St Gregory of Nyssa.³⁶ Paradise thus both transcends and envelops the world.

The fact that such a model is illogical in terms of our (and Ephrem's) experience of the world should warn us to pay attention to St Ephrem's statement that the terrestrial terms used for Paradise should not be taken literally (II.4-5) and to avert us at once to his real intention: he is deliberately drawing our attention to the distinction between sacred space (and time) and ordinary space (and time). Paradise belongs to the former, our world to the latter; they represent two different orders of reality and modes of existence. As Jean Daniélou put it:³⁷ "C'est ce que nous appelons cosmologie mythique ou les dimensions ont valeur ontologique et non scientifique, sans cesser d'être réelles."

By locating Paradise outside time and space as we know them, Ephrem was deliberately going against some much more literalist views of Paradise that were current in the early Christian period; thus in the second century Theophilus of Antioch deduces from the Biblical words "God planted Paradise in Eden to the east" and "He caused to come up from the earth every tree which was beautiful to see and good to eat" that "the divine Scripture clearly teaches us that Paradise is under this very heaven under which are the East and the earth" (*To Autolycus*, II.24). In the early fifth century Theodore of Mopsuestia was like-

³⁶See for example *Patrologia Graeca* 44, col. 1209A (On the Beatitudes, 2).

³⁷"Terre et Paradis chez les Pères de l'Église," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953), p. 451.

wise to interpret the Biblical text in a similarly literalist way. St Ephrem's understanding (which he shares above all with St Gregory of Nyssa) would seem to be far more profound and much richer in meaning; furthermore, precisely because he locates Paradise outside geographical space, his views are left unaffected by modern advances in scientific knowledge.

Since primordial Paradise belongs outside time and space it also serves as the eschatological Paradise, the home of the righteous and glorious after the final Resurrection. Indeed, the saints already in this life anticipate the life of Paradise:

The assembly of saints
bears resemblance to Paradise:
in it each day is plucked
the fruit of Him who gives life to all (VI.8);

and

Among the saints none is naked,
for they have put on glory;
nor is any clad in those leaves
or standing in shame,
for they have found, through our Lord,
the robe that belongs to Adam and Eve (VI.9).

Nevertheless, St Ephrem is emphatic that this eschatological Paradise can only be entered in the resurrected state of the body; in one hymn (V.7-10) his pragmatic mind is concerned with the possibility of overcrowded conditions in Paradise; the difficulty is resolved, however, when he discovers from various scriptural passages that the resurrected body is of a different nature from the physical. Nor can the soul alone enter Paradise: it must be accompanied by the resurrected body (VIII.9). This explains why, in

his vision of Paradise, Ephrem expects the Garden to be empty (V.II), seeing that the final Resurrection has not yet taken place.

Since this Resurrection was regarded as occurring not just outside time, but also at the end of time, it was necessary to provide some accompanying concept to explain what happened to the departed between physical death and the final Resurrection. Here, once again, St Ephrem and other early Syriac writers took over another idea of Jewish origin, that of "the sleep of the dead in Sheol," a period of unconscious existence which bridges the gap between death and the Resurrection, between historical and sacred time. According to this view, judgment is usually understood as taking place only at the final Resurrection, when the "sheep" and the "goats" are separated off, to the right and to the left (Matthew 25:33); it is only then that the just may enter Paradise, while the wicked undergo "second death"³⁸ as they are relegated to Gehenna.

In a few passages St Ephrem hesitatingly speculates about the possibility of some sort of intermediary position for repentant sinners:

Blessed the sinner
who has received mercy there
and is deemed worthy to be given access
to the environs of Paradise:
even though he remains outside,
he may pasture there through grace.

³⁸Although this term occurs in the Revelation of St John (e.g. 2:11), early Syriac writers will have borrowed it directly or indirectly from Jewish sources, seeing that the Revelation was not part of the early Syriac canon of the New Testament and no translation of it into Syriac was made till the late fifth or sixth century. In Jewish writings the phrase occurs chiefly in the Targums (for details see "Jewish traditions in Syriac sources," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 30 (1979), pp. 220-1).

As I reflected I was fearful again
because I had presumed
to suppose that there might be
between the Garden and Hell's fire
a place where those who have found mercy
can receive chastisement and forgiveness (X:14,
compare I.16).

Indeed, in Ephrem's tripartite schema of Paradise, the place allocated to the "penitent" would appear to be outside the "fence" provided by the Cherub, even though this is never explicitly stated. Perhaps, however, the problem is unreal, in that the "barrier" is in fact removed by the Cross and so the boundary on the lower slopes of Paradise can be understood as having been extended downwards to include the "low ground" allocated to the "penitent" immediately below; some support for such a view might be claimed from the Syriac translation of Ephesians 2:14 which reads [Christ] dismantled the barrier [*syaga*] which stood in the midst." (See further below, p. 63.)

The Two Trees

It has already been seen that the two Trees, of Life and of Knowledge, have different positions on the Paradise mountain, the former corresponding to the Holy of Holies, the latter to the sanctuary veil. The Tree of Knowledge is thus the "gate" leading to the Tree of Life (III.13).

St Ephrem, in common with a number of other early Christian writers, held the view that God created Adam and Eve in an intermediate state: if they kept the commandment not to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, then they would be rewarded by being allowed to eat it and would thereby be enabled to progress to the Tree of

Life,³⁹ thus acquiring divinity (as we shall see). In the event, however, their unthinking greed led them to break the commandment, and although they did thereby gain knowledge, it was only a knowledge of what they had lost by their disobedience. In one of the Hymns on the Fast (III.3) St Ephrem puts it as follows

Who is there who can expound that Tree
 which caused those who sought it to go astray?
 It is an invisible target, hidden from the eyes,
 which wearies those who shoot at it.
 It is both the Tree of Knowledge, and of the opposite;
 it is the cause of knowledge, for by it humanity knows
 what was the gift that was lost
 and the punishment that took its place.
 Blessed is that Fruit which has mingled
 a knowledge of the Tree of Life into mortals.

The knowledge imparted by the Tree of Knowledge is of an objective nature, but this knowledge can be experienced subjectively in totally different ways, depending on the attitude of the person who partakes of it. This extremely important insight is explored especially in the third of the Paradise hymns.

³⁹A very similar idea is found in the Palestinian Targum tradition at Genesis 3:22: "And the Lord God said: 'Behold the First Adam, whom I created unique [*ihiday*] in the world, just as I am unique in the highest heavens. From him shall many peoples arise, and from him shall one people arise which knows how to distinguish between Good and Evil. Had he [Adam] kept the precepts of the Law and observed its commandment, he would have lived and existed like the Tree of Life forever; but now that he has failed to keep the precepts of the Law and has not observed its commandment, We shall drive him out of the Garden of Eden, before he stretches out his hand to take of the Tree of Life, eats it and lives on forever," (Neofiti). A similar view, described as Jewish, is outlined by Nemesius, *On the nature of man*, 5.

In the Commentary on Genesis St Ephrem asks himself why God did not from the very first grant to Adam and Eve the higher state he had intended for them. His answer is again of great importance and illustrates the very prominent role which he allocates to human free will (*herutha*, literally "freedom"):⁴⁰

Now because God had given to Adam everything inside and outside Paradise through Grace, requiring nothing in return, either for his creation or for the glory in which He had clothed him, He nevertheless, out of Justice,⁴¹ held back one tree from him to whom He had given, in Grace, everything in Paradise and on earth, in the air and in the seas. For when God created Adam, He did not make him mortal, nor did He fashion him as immortal; this was so that Adam himself, either through keeping the commandment, or by transgressing it, might acquire from this one of the trees whichever outcome he wanted . . . Even though God had given them everything else out of Grace, He wished to confer on them, out of Justice, the immortal life which is granted through eating of the Tree of Life. He therefore laid down this commandment. Not that it was a large commandment, commensurate with the superlative reward that was in preparation for them; no, He only withheld from them a single tree, just so that they might be subject to a commandment. But He gave them the whole of

⁴⁰Commentary on Genesis II.17.

⁴¹Stanzas 9-10 of the third hymn of the Paradise cycle make a very similar point. St Ephrem is very fond of balancing the two divine attributes of Grace and Justice against each other; one might compare the use of the terms *middat ha-din* and *middat ha-rahamim*, "aspects of Judgment and of Mercy," in Rabbinic literature.

Paradise, so that they would not feel any compulsion to transgress the law.

In their intermediate state Adam and Eve are not even aware of the existence of the Tree of Life higher up the mountain of Paradise, for the Tree of Knowledge serves as a sanctuary curtain, veiling the Holy of Holies from sight (III.13,17). St Ephrem gives two main reasons for God's action in keeping the Tree of Life hidden from their sight: first, so that the vision of its beauty might be reserved as a reward for them if they kept the commandment (III.9), and second, so that the attraction of its surpassing beauty might not make the temptation to eat the forbidden fruit, in the hopes of reaching it, irresistible. This second point is made notably in the Commentary on Genesis (II.17), where he adds a further reason.

God had created the Tree of Life and hidden it from Adam and Eve, first, so that it should not, with its beauty, stir up conflict with them and so double their struggle, and also because it was inappropriate that they should be observant of the commandment of Him who cannot be seen for the sake of a reward that was there before their eyes.

Under the Old Covenant the Tree of Life continued to remain hidden from humanity, and it was only with the Crucifixion that it was finally made manifest.

Greatly saddened was the Tree of Life
when it beheld Adam stolen away from it;
it sank down into the virgin ground and was hidden
—to burst forth and reappear on Golgotha;
humanity, like birds that are chased,
took refuge in it
so that it might return them to their proper home.

The chaser was chased away, while the doves
that had been chased
now hop with joy in Paradise.

(Hymn on Virginity XVI.10)

As the source of immortality, "the Tree of Life is the symbol of the Son of the Living One" (Hymn on the Church XLIX.16), whose Eucharistic fruit is plucked daily in the Church, as we learn from the seventh of the Paradise hymns (Stanza 8):

The assembly of saints
has a semblance of Paradise:
in it, daily, is plucked the Fruit
of Him who gives life to all.

More frequently, however, St Ephrem prefers to dwell on the typological contrast between the Tree of Knowledge, whose fruit brought death to Adam, and the Tree of the Cross, whose fruit restores life to humanity:

In His love there came to us the blessed Tree:
the one wood undid the work of the other,
the one fruit was annulled by the other,
that which brought death by that which is alive.

(Hymn on Virginity VIII.1).

A similar contrast is found in the Commentary on the Diatessaron (XXI.25): "we have eaten his Body instead of the fruit of the Tree." In one of the hymns preserved only in Armenian translation (XLIX.9-10) we find a rather different emphasis, for here Christ is contrasted with the Tree of Life:

With the blade of the sword of the cherub
was the path to the Tree of Life shut off,

but to the Peoples has the Lord of that Tree
given Himself as food.

Whereas Eden's other trees were provided
for that former Adam to eat,
for us the very Planter of the Garden
has become the food for our souls.

The following verse,

Whereas we had left that Garden
along with Adam, as he left it behind,
now that the sword has been removed by the lance,
we may return there,

where Genesis 3:24 is contrasted with John 19:34, provides
a convenient introduction to our next topic.

The Fence and the Sword

Originally God's commandment had sufficed to prevent
Adam and Eve from penetrating too far up the sacred
mountain, but their disobedience led to the imposition of
an inviolate boundary provided by the cherub with the
sharp revolving sword (Gen. 3:24):

The Just One saw how Adam had become audacious
because He had been lenient
and knew that he would overstep again
if He continued thus:

Adam trampled down
that gentle and pleasant boundary,
so instead God made for Adam
a boundary guarded by force.

The mere words of the commandment
had been the boundary to the Tree,
but now the cherub and a sharp sword
provided the fence to Paradise.

(Hymn on Paradise IV.1)

This more permanent boundary was situated at a point lower down the mountain, by the fig trees with whose leaves Adam and Eve had clothed themselves (Hymn II.7). It is on the low ground, beyond this lower circumference, that the primordial pair take up their residence after their expulsion from the Garden (I.10).

As we have already seen in passing, this new boundary imposed after the Fall is termed the "fence" or "barrier" (*syaga*) by St Ephrem. The word is derived in early Syriac tradition from Ephesians 2:14, which reads in the standard Syriac version of the New Testament, the Peshitta, as follows: "Christ . . . dismantled the barrier [*syaga*] which stood in the midst, and the enmity, in his flesh; and the law with the commandments He has annulled by His own commandments." In the Greek original the barrier (*phragmos*) probably refers to the Law, but the Syriac translator has so phrased the sentence that the "barrier" and the "law" could readily be taken as referring to two different things, and this is how early Syriac writers regularly understand the passage, for they link the "barrier" of Ephesians with the Fall; justification for this interpretation was found in St Paul's mention of the "enmity" which Syriac writers saw as a reference to Genesis 3:15, "I will place enmity between you and the woman." Thus in the Book of Steps⁴² (a collection of homilies on the spiritual life compiled around AD 400) the Pauline passage is paraphrased with the words ". . . breach the barrier of enmity which existed because of the transgression of the commandment." Aphra-

⁴²*Homily XV.12 (in Patrologia Syriaca III).*

hat too, who was writing before Ephrem, in the second quarter of the fourth century, is already using the term *syaga*, "barrier," "fence," in connection with Genesis 3:24, when he speaks⁴³ of the Tree of Life as being "*fenced in* at the command of the Almighty by the fearsome sword and the encircling flame"; elsewhere⁴⁴ his phraseology explicitly links Gen. 3:24 with Eph. 2:14: "Christ broke down the fence and the blade of the sword."

The precise moment at which Christ effected the dismantling of this fence was when his own side was pierced by the lance on the Cross (John 19:34): "The sword that pierced Christ removed the sword guarding Paradise," states St Ephrem in one of the Hymns on the Crucifixion (IX.2), while in the Hymns on the Nativity (VIII.4) he writes:

Blessed be the Merciful One
 who saw the sword beside Paradise,
 barring the way to the Tree of Life;
 He came and took to Himself a body
 which was wounded so that,
 by the opening of His side,
 He might open up the way into Paradise.

John 19:34 is a key verse for St Ephrem's symbolic theology, seeing that it serves as a focal point for a great deal of his typological exegesis.⁴⁵ The lance and the side of Christ, the Second Adam, both point back to the Genesis

⁴³*Demonstration XXIII.3* (in *Patrologia Syriaca* II).

⁴⁴*Demonstration XIV.31* (in *Patrologia Syriaca* I).

⁴⁵On this theme see R. Murray, "The Lance which re-opened Paradise," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), pp. 224-34, 491; S. P. Brock, "The Mysteries hidden in the side of Christ," *Sobornost* VIII.6 (1978), pp. 462-72; *The Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition*, pp. 88-93, and *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 61-4.

narrative, to the cherub's sword⁴⁶ and to the First Adam's side which gave miraculous birth to Eve. The side of Christ, whence issue—or flow⁴⁷—water and blood, also looks forward to the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, and, at the same time, to the equally miraculous birth of the Church. Two passages from St Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron (Gospel Harmony) illustrate this line of interpretation. In one we have a straightforward exposition:

"There came forth blood and water": that is, His Church, which is build on his "side." Just as in the case of Adam, his wife was taken from his side. Adam's wife is his "rib," so our Lord's "blood" is His Church. From Adam's rib issued death, from our Lord's rib, life.

(Commentary on the Diatessaron XXI.11)

The other passage, however, takes on a lyrical character:

I ran to all Your limbs, and from them all I received every kind of gift. Through the side pierced with the sword I entered the Garden fenced in with the sword. Let us enter in through that side which was pierced, since we were stripped naked by the counsel of the

⁴⁶Although the Biblical texts of Gen 3:24 and John 19:34 employ two different words, Syriac writers, in order to emphasize the typological connections, frequently use the same word with reference to both weapons.

⁴⁷In allusions to the passage the wording is sometimes deliberately altered from "issued" to "flowed" in order to link this passage with a christological interpretation of John 7:37-8, depending on a different punctuation from that which has become traditional, thus: "If anyone thirsts, let everyone who believes in me come to me and drink: as the Scripture has said, 'Out of His belly shall flow rivers of living water'"; compare R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, p. 213.

rib that was extracted. The fire that burned in Adam, burned him in that rib of his. For this reason the side of the Second Adam has been pierced, and from it comes a flow of water to quench the fire of the first Adam.

(Commentary on the Diatessaron XXI.10)

The Robe of Glory

One thing that will quickly strike the modern reader is St Ephrem's predilection for clothing imagery⁴⁸: at the Fall Adam and Eve are stripped of a "Robe of Glory," God "puts on names" in the Scriptures, Christ "puts on the body" at the Incarnation,⁴⁹ He "puts on our weakness." In all this St Ephrem is simply developing imagery which is already present in abundance in both the Old and the New Testaments; particularly important in this connection are passages in St Paul's writings, such as Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27, where the Christian is said to "put on Christ." St Ephrem is by no means the first writer to exploit this metaphor, for it is to be met with in almost all early Christian writers, and its application to the Incarnation is already found in Melito and other early Christian authors; his originality, however, lies in the way in which he employs this imagery as a means of linking together in a dynamic fashion the whole of salvation his-

⁴⁸See A. Kowalski, "'Rivestiti di gloria.' Adamo ed Eva nel commento di S. Efrem a Gen 2, 25," *Cristianesimo nella storia* (Bologna) 3 (1982), pp. 41-60; S. P. Brock, "Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition," in M. Schmidt (ed.), *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstätt Beiträge 4, 1982), pp. 11-40, and *The Luminous Eye*, ch. 5.

⁴⁹This phrase features in the oldest Syriac translation of the Nicene Creed, representing *sarkōthenta* in the Greek.

tory; it is a means of indicating the interrelatedness between every stage in this continuing working out of divine Providence. Basically there are four main episodes which go to make up this cosmic drama: at the Fall, Adam and Eve lose the "Robe of Glory" with which they had originally been clothed in Paradise; in order to re-clothe the naked Adam and Eve (in other words, humanity), God himself "puts on the body" from Mary, and at the Baptism Christ laid the Robe of Glory in the river Jordan, making it available once again for humanity to put on at baptism; then, at his or her baptism, the individual Christian, in "putting on Christ," puts on the Robe of Glory, thus re-entering the terrestrial anticipation of the eschatological Paradise, in other words, the Church; finally, at the Resurrection of the Dead, the just will in all reality reenter the celestial Paradise, clothed in their Robes of Glory.

The Robe of Glory thus provides the thread which links up between the primordial and the eschatological Paradise, and the mention of it in any one context is intended immediately to conjure up in the reader's mind the entire span of salvation history, thus admirably emphasizing, for example, the place of each individual Christian's Baptism within the divine economy as a whole.

Whence does the term "Robe of Glory" originate? It is evident that St Ephrem and the other early Syriac writers derived it ultimately from Jewish circles, where the term arose from a particular interpretation of Genesis 3:21.⁵⁰ In that verse the Hebrew and the ancient versions read, "And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin"; it so happens, however, that the Hebrew word for "skin" is very similar to that for "light," and a famous late-first-century rabbi, Rabbi Meir, is reputed to have had a manuscript of Genesis which actually read "garments of

⁵⁰For details see the literature cited in the articles mentioned in note 48. See also the note to Commentary on Genesis II.33.

light." The Aramaic Targum tradition, furthermore, translates the phrase by "garments of honor (*or* glory)," very similar to the "Robe of Glory," characteristic of Syriac writers. Now although Genesis 3:21 is usually understood as referring to the time *after* the Fall, there was clearly a tradition current in some Jewish circles around the turn of the Christian era which understood it to refer to the time *prior* to the Fall: "the Lord God *had* made . . . garments of glory." Syriac writers themselves appear never to have interpreted the time reference in Genesis 3:21 in this way, but it must be from circles that once did that they have derived the term "Robe of Glory."⁵¹ It is interesting that the idea of this original Robe of Glory worn by Adam seems to have been already familiar to the Syriac translator of Psalm 8:6, which he rendered "You created man a little less than the angels: in honor and glory did you *clothe* him" (both the Hebrew and the Greek have ". . . did you crown him").

In the Hymns on Paradise St Ephrem alludes to Adam's loss of his original Robe of Glory a number of times, notably in XV.8-9, but for the subsequent history of this Robe and its restoration we have to turn for the most part to other works. In the Hymns on Virginity (XVI.9) the whole purpose of the Incarnation is seen as the restoration of Adam's original garment.

Christ came to find Adam who had gone astray,
to return him to Eden in the garment of light.

In order to restore Adam to the glory of which he had been stripped at the Fall, God the Word likewise has to strip himself of his divine glory and "put on Adam's body." The

⁵¹The terms "robe" or "garment of light," reflecting R. Meir's Biblical text, are also often used by Syriac writers (in the Paradise hymns see VII.5, IX.28 and XIV.8).

symmetry between the Fall and the Restoration is brought out in one of the Nativity hymns (XXIII.13).

All these changes did the Merciful One make,
stripping off glory and putting on a body;
for He had devised a way to reclothe Adam
in that glory which he had stripped off.
He was wrapped in swaddling clothes,
corresponding to Adam's leaves,
He put on clothes
in place of Adam's skins;
He was baptized for Adam's sin,
He was embalmed for Adam's death,
He rose and raised Adam up in His glory.
Blessed is He who descended,
put Adam on and ascended.

A somewhat different slant is to be found in the Commentary on the Diatessaron (XVI.10), where St Ephrem sees the episode of the withering of the fig tree (Matthew 21:20-21) as pointing to the replacement of the fig leaves of Genesis 3:7 by the Robe of Glory, recovered for Adam and Eve by Christ:

When Adam sinned and was stripped of the glory in which he had been clothed, he covered his nakedness with fig leaves. Our Savior came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and provide a garment of glory for his nakedness. He dried up the fig tree, in order to show that there would no longer be any need of fig leaves to serve as Adam's garment, since Adam had returned to his former glory, and so no longer had any need of leaves or garments of skin.

And elsewhere Ephrem exclaims (Hymn on the Fast II.2),

"Blessed is He who had pity on Adam's leaves, and sent a Robe of Glory to cover his naked state."

In all this it is characteristic of St Ephrem's essentially Semitic understanding of the Biblical narrative that he is able to move rapidly to and fro between the individual and the collective, between Adam and humanity as a whole. Thus Christ is said to have "put on Adam" (Hymn on the Fast II.4), "Adam's body" (Nisibene Hymn XXXV.8), "humanity" (Hymn on the Fast III.6), and "our body" (Hymn on the Nativity XXII.39). Quite often some reference to the Virgin will be incorporated, as in one of the Nativity hymns (IV.188):

She wove Him a garment and clothed Him
because He had stripped off His glory.

Later writers, such as Jacob of Serugh, relate how Christ "came to Baptism, went down and placed in the baptismal water the Robe of Glory, to be there for Adam, who had lost it."⁵² Although St Ephrem does not have such explicit references to this aspect of the Robe imagery, it is certainly implied in a number of passages such as the following from the Hymns on the Church (XXXVI.6):

The brightness which Moses put on⁵³
was wrapped on him from without,
whereas the river in which Christ was baptized
put on Light from within,
and so did Mary's body, in which He resided,
gleam from within.

That Christian baptism was the means for the recovery of

⁵²Homily 94, On Faith (ed. P. Bedjan, III, p. 593).

⁵³Exodus 34:29 (Sinai). A translation of the entire hymn will be found in *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1975), pp. 137-44.

the lost Robe is made clear from one of the Epiphany hymns attributed to St Ephrem (XII.4):

Instead of with leaves from the trees
He clothed them with glory in the water.

In several passages the Robe of Glory takes on an eschatological aspect, as in the Paradise hymn VI.9:

Among the saints
their nakedness is clothed with glory,
none is clad with leaves
or stands ashamed,
for they have found, through our Lord,
the robe that belongs to Adam and Eve.

In one of a famous group of poems (Hymn on Faith LXXXIII.2) on the symbolism of the pearl, St Ephrem addresses the pearl as follows:

You are like Eve,
who though naked was still clothed.
Cursed is he who deceived and left her stripped.
The serpent cannot strip off your glory;
in Eden women shall be clothed in light, resembling you.

This garment of glory or light is also identified as the wedding garment of the parable in Matthew 22:12, and with this in mind St Ephrem exhorts the baptized to preserve their robe unspotted in readiness for the eschatological banquet:

The Firstborn wrapped himself in a body
as a veil to hide His glory.
The immortal Bride shines out in that robe;
let the guests in their robes resemble Him in His.

Let your bodies—which are your clothing—shine out,
 for they bound in fetters that man whose body was
 stained.
 O whiten my stains at Your banquet with your radiance.
 (Nisibene Hymn XLIII.21)

In a fine meditation on the Last Judgment, where he gazes on “the mirror of the Gospel,” St Ephrem moves from the wedding feast to the theme of Paradise as the actual bridal chamber.⁵⁴

I saw there beautiful people, and I was desirous of
 their beauty and I saw the place of the good where
 they were standing, and I was eager for their position.
 I saw their bridal chamber opposite, which no one
 who has not a lamp may enter; I saw their joy, and
 I myself sat down in mourning, not possessing works
 worthy of that bridal chamber. I saw them clothed
 with the Robe of Light, and I was grieved that I had
 prepared no virtuous raiment.

Paradise Regained: Divinization

The ultimate aim of the Incarnation, however, was not just to restore Adam's humanity to Paradise, but to raise humanity to the position of honor that Adam and Eve would have been granted had they kept the divine commandment, as St Ephrem explains in the Commentary on Genesis II.23.

... had the serpent been rejected, along with the sin,
 they would have eaten of the Tree of Life, and the

⁵⁴Letter to Publius, 12 (ed. with English translation in *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), p. 284). For the significance of the “Bridal chamber,” see above, on St Ephrem and monasticism.

Tree of Knowledge would not have been withheld from them any longer; from the one they would have acquired infallible knowledge, and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity [*allahutha*] in humanity; and had they thus acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life, they would have done so in this body.

Elsewhere, in one of the Nisibene hymns (LXIX.12)⁵⁵ he puts the matter succinctly as follows:

The Most High knew that Adam wanted to become a
god,
so He sent His Son who put him on in order to grant
him his desire.

The same idea recurs in the Hymns on Virginity (XLVIII. 17-18):

Divinity flew down and descended
to raise and draw up humanity.
The Son has made beautiful the servant's deformity,
and he has become a god, just as he desired.

It has sometimes been said that the concept of the divinization, or *theosis*, of humanity is something that crept into Christianity, and especially Eastern Christianity, under Hellenic influence. It is clear, however, that St Ephrem, whom Theodoret described as "unacquainted with the language of the Greeks,"⁵⁶ and whose thought patterns are essentially Semitic and Biblical in character, is nonetheless an important witness to this teaching. Moreover in this context it should be recalled that, since the term "son of"

⁵⁵A translation of the whole hymn is to be found in *The Harp of the Spirit*, no. 16.

⁵⁶Ecclesiastical History IV.29. On divinization see also *The Luminous Eye*, pp. 123-7.

implies "belonging to the category of," the title "children of God" to which Christians attain at Baptism would suggest to the Semitic mind that they had, potentially, the characteristics of divine beings, in other words, immortality. Once again the theological content of St Ephrem's poetry is remarkably similar to that of his Greek contemporaries—only the mode of expression is different. Just as St Athanasius expressed this mystery epigrammatically ("God became man so that man might become God"), so too, in his own way, did St Ephrem:

He gave us divinity,
we gave Him humanity
(Hymn on Faith V.17)

The Present Translation

St Ephrem's hymns present the translator with many problems arising out of the condensed and allusive style of his writing. At times his thought requires considerable unpacking if it is to become meaningful to the modern reader, and in such places (where any literal translation would actually prove misleading) a slightly expanded translation has been given. Sometimes it has also proved necessary to resort to the use of an explanatory note as well, but, in order not to divert the reader unduly from the text, these notes are collected together at the end of the translation. An asterisk in the text alerts the reader to these notes.

In the case of Biblical references and allusions, however, it has seemed preferable to give these (or at least the most important of them) in the form of footnotes to the translation. Here it should be observed that St Ephrem is extremely fond of evoking an entire Biblical passage by means of the use of a single choice word, and clearly he expected his hearers to know the Bible extremely well; a good example of this can be found in the various allusions

to Matthew 15:27 where the Canaanite woman replies to Christ "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table" (Hymns I.16, VII.26 and IX.29).

In his use of imagery Ephrem is often highly original, and at times his choice can strike the modern reader as somewhat bizarre; in such cases the translator might be tempted to alter the imagery, but as far as possible I have tried to avoid this. A further difficulty lies in the fact that certain Syriac words and their standard English equivalents can have entirely different ranges of meaning. Perhaps no term is more problematic than *'ubba*, "womb," for in Syriac the word, a favorite of Ephrem's, can also mean "lap," "bosom," "bud," "cavity," "pocket," "gulf," etc. Since Ephrem uses the term in a whole variety of different senses the translator is forced by the varying contexts to employ several English renderings, thereby losing an important linking element in St Ephrem's symbolic thought pattern.

A modern translation of St Ephrem's poetry thus needs to steer a narrow course between the Scylla of pedantic literalism and the Charybdis of excessive freedom, for either extreme can prove positively misleading. Although the present rendering has aimed at sailing such a course, it certainly would not presume to claim to have escaped unscathed from any encounter with the rocks on either side, but if it be judged at least to have avoided total shipwreck, then this is thanks to the skill and sensitivity of Elizabeth Rapp and Dana Miller⁵⁷ who carefully worked over and greatly improved drafts of the translation.

Sebastian Brock

⁵⁷Dana Miller also generously gave me his own draft translation of Hymns I-IX; I have greatly benefited from his insights into the meaning of several obscure passages.



2.

THE HYMNS ON PARADISE

HYMN I

At the outset, St Ephrem emphasizes that the Biblical narrative concerning Paradise in Genesis 2-3 contains much more profound teaching than any literal reading of the text would suggest. Our reading of it should accordingly be accompanied by a sense both of awe and of love; only then will the "inner vision" be enabled to perceive something of the profundity of its meaning.

The second half of the poem concerns the topographical relationship of Paradise to the fallen world—first in the context of Adam and his immediate descendants, and then from an eschatological point of view, based on the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31).

1. Moses, who instructs all men
 with his celestial writings,
He, the master* of the Hebrews,
 has instructed us in his teaching—
the Law,* which constitutes
 a very treasure house of revelations,
wherein is revealed
 the tale of the Garden—
described by things visible,
 but glorious for what lies hidden,

*See notes at end of translation.

spoken of in few words,
yet wondrous with its many plants.

RESPONSE: Praise to Your righteousness
which exalts those who prove victorious.

2. I took my stand halfway
 between awe and love;
a yearning for Paradise
 invited me to explore it,
but awe at its majesty
 restrained me from my search.
With wisdom, however,
 I reconciled the two;
I revered what lay hidden
 and meditated on what was revealed.
The aim of my search was to gain profit,
 the aim of my silence was to find succor.
3. Joyfully did I embark
 on the tale of Paradise—
a tale that is short to read
 but rich to explore.
My tongue read the story's
 outward narrative,
while my intellect took wing
 and soared upward in awe
as it perceived the splendor of Paradise—
 not indeed as it really is,
but insofar as humanity
 is granted to comprehend it.
4. With the eye of my mind
 I gazed upon Paradise;
the summit of every mountain
 is lower than its summit,

the crest of the Flood
reached only its foothills;¹
these it kissed with reverence
before turning back
to rise above and subdue the peak
of every hill and mountain.
The foothills of Paradise it kisses,
while every summit it buffets.

5. Not that the ascent to Paradise
is arduous because of its height,
for those who inherit it
experience no toil there.
With its beauty it joyfully
urges on those who ascend.
Amidst glorious rays
it lies resplendent,
all fragrant with its scents;
magnificent clouds
fashion the abodes
of those who are worthy of it.
6. From their abodes
the children of light descend,
they rejoice in the midst of the world
where they had been persecuted;
they dance on the sea's surface
and do not sink,
for Simon, although a "Rock,"
did not sink.²
Blessed is he who has seen,
together with them, his beloved ones,

¹Gen. 7:19.

²Matt. 14:29.

below in their bands of disciples,
and on high in their bridal chambers.*

7. The clouds, their chariots
fly through the air;
each of them has become the leader
of those he has taught;³
his chariot corresponds to his labors,
his glory corresponds to his followers.⁴
Blessed the person who has seen
as they fly
the Prophets with their bands,
the Apostles with their multitudes;
for whoever has both acted and taught
is great in the Kingdom.⁵
8. But because the sight of Paradise
is far removed,
and the eye's range
cannot attain to it,
I have described it over simply,
making bold a little.
Resembling that halo
which surrounds the moon
we should look upon Paradise
as being circular too,
having both sea and dry land
encompassed within it.
9. And because my tongue overflows
as one who has sucked
the sweetness of Paradise,
I will portray it in diverse forms.

³Dan. 12:3.

⁴cf 1 Cor. 3:8.

⁵Matt. 5:19.

Moses made a crown
for that resplendent altar;⁶
with a wreath entirely of gold
did he crown
the altar in its beauty.
Thus gloriously entwined
is the wreath of Paradise
that encircles the whole of creation.

10. When Adam sinned
God cast him forth from Paradise,
but in His grace He granted him
the low ground beyond it,
settling him in the valley*
below the foothills of Paradise;
but when mankind even there continued to sin
they were blotted out,
and because they were unworthy
to be neighbors of Paradise,
God commanded the Ark
to cast them out on Mount Qardu.*⁷
11. There the families
of the two brothers had separated:
Cain went off by himself
and lived in the land of Nod,⁸
a place lower still
than that of Sheth and Enosh;
but those who lived on higher ground,
who were called
“the children of God,”*⁹
left their own region and came down

⁶Exod. 30:3.

⁷Gen. 8:4 (Peshitta).

⁸Gen. 4:16.

⁹Gen. 6:2.

to take wives
from the daughters of Cain down below.

12. The children of light
 dwell on the heights of Paradise,
and beyond the Abyss
 they espy the rich man;¹⁰
he too, as he raises his eyes,
 beholds Lazarus,
and calls out to Abraham
 to have pity on him.
But Abraham, that man so full of pity,
 who even had pity on Sodom,¹¹
has no pity yonder
 for him who showed no pity.
13. The Abyss severs any love
 which might act as a mediary,
thus preventing the love of the just
 from being bound to the wicked,
so that the good should not be tortured
 by the sight, in Gehenna,
of their children or brothers
 or family—
a mother,* who had denied Christ,
 imploring mercy from her son
or her maid or her daughter,
 who all had suffered affliction for the sake of
Christ's teaching.
14. There the persecuted laugh
 at their persecutors,

¹⁰Luke 16:26.

¹¹Gen. 8:20.

the afflicted at those who had caused them affliction,
the slain at those who had put them to death,
the Prophets at those who had stoned them,
the Apostles at those who had crucified them.
The children of light reside
in their lofty abode
and, as they gaze on the wicked
and count their evil actions,
they are amazed to what extent these people
have cut off all hope by committing such iniquity.

15. Woe to him who tries to hide
his shameful deeds in the dark,
who does wrong and then tries to deceive
those who have seen;
having gone in and committed some wrong
he lies so as to deceive those who have heard.
May the wings of Your grace¹²
protect me,
for there the accusing finger
points out
and daily proclaims
the sinner's shame and hidden dealings.
16. What I have told
must suffice my boldness;
but if there is anyone
who dares to go on and say
"As for the dull-witted and simple people,
who have done wrong out of ignorance,
once they have been punished
and paid their debt,
He who is good allows them to dwell
in some remote corner of Paradise

¹²Ps. 16(17):8.

where they can graze on
that blessed food of 'the crumbs' . . ."¹³*

17. This place, despised and spurned
by the denizens of Paradise,
those who burn in Gehenna
hungrily desire;
their torment doubles
at the sight of its fountains,
they quiver violently
as they stand on the opposite side;
the rich man, too, begs for succor,*
but there is no one to wet his tongue,¹⁴
for fire is within them,
while the water is opposite them.

HYMN II

At Judgment the gate to Paradise will sift the good from the bad; its discerning powers allow in all those who, while still on earth, have forged a key to Paradise by the conduct of their lives whereas those who have neglected to do so find themselves excluded: their moral ugliness is incompatible with the spiritual beauties of Paradise. Those who prove worthy of Paradise will be given an abode appropriate to the character of their life on earth; like the Ark and like Mount Sinai at the Lawgiving, Paradise is divided into three different levels.

1. Blessed is he
for whom Paradise yearns.
Yes, Paradise yearns for the man whose goodness
makes him beautiful;

¹³Matt. 15:27 and parallels.

¹⁴Luke 16:24.

it engulfs him at its gateway,
it embraces him in its bosom,
it caresses him in its very womb;
for it splits open and receives him
into its inmost parts.
But if there is someone it abhors,
it removes him and casts him out;
this is the gate of testing
that belongs to Him who loves mankind.¹

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who was pierced
and so removed the sword from the entry to
Paradise.*²

2. Forge here on earth and take
the key* to Paradise;
the Door that welcomes you³
smiles radiantly upon you;
the Door, all discerning,
conforms its measure to those who enter it:
in its wisdom
it shrinks and it grows.
According to the stature and rank
attained by each person,
it shows by its dimensions
whether they are perfect, or lacking in something.
3. When people see
that they have lost everything,
that riches do not endure
and carnal desires no longer exist,

¹cf John 10:7.

²Gen. 3:24; John 19:34.

³cf John 10:9.

that beauty and power
disappear and vanish,
then they recollect themselves
and are filled with remorse,
because, choked with care,
they heard with contempt those words,
“Your possessions are but a passing dream,
your inheritance, darkness.”*

4. What they once possessed they have lost,
and found what they never had;
they desired happiness, but it flew away,
and the woe they had dreaded has arrived;
what they had hoped on has proved an illusion,
and what they never sought for they have now
found.

They groan because they are brought low
and have been “robbed,”
for their way of life deceived them,
while their torment is very real;
their luxurious living* has vanished,
and their punishment does not come to an end.

5. The righteous, too, perceive
that their own affliction no longer exists,
their suffering does not endure,
their burden no longer remains,
and it seems as if no anguish
had ever assailed them.
Their fasts appear
as though a mere dream,
for they have woken as it were from sleep
to discover Paradise
and the Kingdom's table⁴
spread out before them.

⁴Luke 22:30.

6. By those who are outside
the summit cannot be scaled,
but from inside Paradise inclines its whole self
to all who ascend it;
the whole of its interior
gazes upon the just with joy.
Paradise girds the loins
of the world,
encircling the great sea;
neighbor to the beings on high,
friendly to those within it,
hostile to those without.
7. At its boundary I saw
figs, growing in a sheltered place,⁵
from which crowns were made that adorned
the brows of the guilty pair,
while their leaves blushed, as it were,
for him who was stripped naked:
their leaves were required for those two
who had lost their garments;*
although they covered Adam,
still they made him blush with shame and repent,
because, in a place of such splendor,
a man who is naked is filled with shame.
8. Who is capable of gazing
upon the Garden's splendor,
seeing how glorious it is in all its design,
how harmonious in its proportions,
how spacious for those who dwell there,
how radiant with its abodes?
Its fountains delight
with their fragrance,

⁵Gen. 3:7.

but when they issue forth toward us*
they become impoverished in our country,
since they put on the savors
of our land as we drink them.

9. Indeed, that Will
for whom everything is easy
constrains these abundant
fountains of Paradise,
confining them with land,
like water channels;
He summoned them to issue forth
in our direction,
just as He bound up the waters⁶
in the bosom of His clouds,
ready to be sent forth into the atmosphere
at the bidding of His Will.
10. When He made this intricate design
He varied its beauties,
so that some levels
were far more glorious than others.
To the degree that one level
is higher than another,
so too is its glory
the more sublime.
In this way He allots
the foothills to the most lowly,
the slopes to those in between
and the heights to the exalted.
11. When the just ascend its various levels
to receive their inheritance,

⁶cf Prov. 30:4.

with justice He raises up each one
to the degree that accords with his labors;
each is stopped at the level
whereof he is worthy,
there being sufficient levels in Paradise
for everyone:
the lowest parts for the repentant,
the middle for the righteous,
the heights for those victorious,
while the summit is reserved for God's Presence.*

12. Noah made the animals live
in the lowest part of the Ark;
in the middle part
he lodged the birds,
while Noah himself, like the Deity,
resided on the upper deck.
On Mount Sinai it was the people
who dwelt below,
the priests round about it,
and Aaron halfway up,
while Moses was on its heights,
and the Glorious One on the summit.

13. A symbol of the divisions
in that Garden of Life
did Moses trace out in the Ark
and on Mount Sinai too;
he depicted for us the types of Paradise
with all its arrangements:
harmonious, fair and desirable
in all things—
in its height, its beauty,
its fragrance, and its different species.
Here is the harbor of all riches,
whereby the Church is depicted.

HYMN III

At the summit of Paradise stands the Tree of Life, whose glory is so great that it cannot be approached; indeed, for Adam and Eve any approach to it was effectively hedged off by the Tree of Knowledge, lower down the mountain, whose fruit they had been forbidden to eat. The serpent, however, manages to persuade them to disobey the divine commandment and to eat the forbidden fruit. This act of disobedience opens Adam's eye both to the higher state of glory which God had destined for Eve and him if only they had kept the commandment, and to the shame that failure to keep it had brought upon them. The consequence of their action is a judgment which is in fact self-imposed.

Ephrem here follows a tradition known from a number of early Christian writers that Adam and Eve had been created in an intermediate state; whether or not they would be raised to a higher state God leaves to the outcome of the exercise of their free will. This is a theme developed at greater length in the Commentary on Genesis II:14-23.

The Tree of Knowledge can be understood as playing the same role as the sanctuary veil: only those authorized to do so may penetrate inside it; Adam, like king Uzziah (2 Chron. 26), presumptuously tried to enter—with disastrous results.

1. As for that part of the Garden, my beloved,
 which is situated so gloriously
at the summit of that height
 where dwells the Glory,
not even its symbol
 can be depicted in man's thought;
for what mind
 has the sensitivity
to gaze upon it,
 or the faculties to explore it,
or the capacity to attain to that Garden
 whose riches are beyond comprehension.

RESPONSE: Praise to Your Justice that crowns the
victorious.

2. Perhaps that blessed tree,
the Tree of Life,
is, by its rays,
the sun of Paradise;
its leaves glisten,
and on them are impressed
the spiritual graces
of that Garden.
In the breezes the other trees
bow down as if in worship
before that sovereign
and leader of the trees.
3. In the very midst He planted
the Tree of Knowledge,¹
endowing it with awe,
hedging it in with dread,
so that it might straightway serve
as a boundary to the inner region of Paradise.
Two things did Adam hear
in that single decree:
that they should not eat of it²
and that, by shrinking from it,
they should perceive that it was not lawful
to penetrate further, beyond that Tree.³
4. The serpent could not
enter Paradise,
for neither animal
nor bird

¹Gen. 2:9.

²Gen. 2:17.

³Gen. 3:7.

was permitted to approach
the outer region of Paradise,
and Adam had to go out
to meet them;
so the serpent cunningly learned,
through questioning Eve,
the character of Paradise,
what it was and how it was ordered.

5. When the accursed one learned
how the glory of that inner Tabernacle,
as if in a sanctuary,
was hidden from them,
and that the Tree of Knowledge,
clothed with an injunction,
served as the veil
for the sanctuary,
he realized that its fruit
was the key of justice
that would open the eyes of the bold
—and cause them great remorse.
6. Their eyes were open*—
though at the same time they were still closed
so as not to see the Glory
or their own low estate,
so as not to see the Glory
of that inner Tabernacle,
nor to see the nakedness
of their own bodies.
These two kinds of knowledge
God hid in the Tree,
placing it as a judge
between the two parties.

7. But when Adam boldly ran
and ate of its fruit
this double knowledge
straightway flew toward him,
tore away and removed
both veils from his eyes:
he beheld the Glory of the Holy of Holies
and trembled;
he beheld, too, his own shame and blushed,
groaning and lamenting
because the twofold knowledge he had gained
had proved for him a torment.
8. Whoever has eaten
of that fruit
either sees and is filled with delight,
or he sees and groans out.
The serpent incited them to eat in sin
so that they might lament;
having seen the blessed state,
they could not taste of it—
like that hero of old*
whose torment was doubled
because in his hunger he could not taste
the delights which he beheld.
9. For God had not allowed him
to see his naked state,
so that, should he spurn the commandment,
his ignominy might be shown him.
Nor did He show him the Holy of Holies,
in order that, if he kept the command,
he might set eyes upon it
and rejoice.
These two things did God conceal,
as the two recompenses,

so that Adam might receive, by means of his contest,
a crown that befitted his actions.

10. God established the Tree as judge,
so that if Adam should eat from it,
it might show him that rank
which he had lost through his pride,
and show him, as well, that low estate
he had acquired, to his torment.
Whereas, if he should overcome and conquer,
it would robe him in glory
and reveal to him also
the nature of shame,
so that he might acquire, in his good health,
an understanding of sickness.
11. A man, indeed, who has acquired
good health in himself,
and is aware in his mind
of what sickness is,
has gained something beneficial
and he knows something profitable;
but a man who lies
in sickness,
and knows in his mind
what is good health,
is vexed by his sickness
and tormented in his mind.
12. Had Adam conquered,*
he would have acquired
glory upon his limbs,
and discernment of what suffering is,
so that he might be radiant in his limbs
and grow in his discernment.
But the serpent reversed all this

and made him taste
abasement in reality,
and glory in recollection only,
so that he might feel shame at what he had found
and weep at what he had lost.

13. The Tree was to him
like a gate;
its fruit was the veil
covering that hidden Tabernacle.
Adam snatched the fruit,
casting aside the commandment.
When he beheld that Glory
within,
shining forth with its rays,
he fled outside;
he ran off and took refuge
among the modest fig trees.
14. In the midst of Paradise God had planted
the Tree of Knowledge
to separate off, above and below,
sanctuary from Holy of Holies.
Adam made bold to touch,
and was smitten like Uzziah:^{*4}
the king became leprous,
Adam was stripped.
Being struck like Uzziah,
he hastened to leave:
both kings* fled and hid,
in shame of their bodies.
15. Even though all the trees
of Paradise

⁴² Chron. 26:16.

are clothed each in its own glory,
yet each veils itself at the Glory;
the Seraphs with their wings,
the trees with their branches,
all cover their faces so as not to behold
their Lord.

They all blushed at Adam
who was suddenly found naked;
the serpent had stolen his garments,
for which it was deprived of its feet.*

16. God did not permit
Adam to enter
that innermost Tabernacle;
this was withheld,
so that first he might prove pleasing
in his service of that outer Tabernacle;
like a priest
with fragrant incense,
Adam's keeping of the commandment
was to be his censer;
then he might enter before the Hidden One
into that hidden Tabernacle.
17. The symbol of Paradise
was depicted by Moses
who made the two sanctuaries,
the sanctuary and the Holy of Holies;
into the outer one
entrance was permitted,
but into the inner,
only once a year.⁵
So too with Paradise,
God closed off the inner part,
but He opened up the outer,
wherein Adam might graze.

⁵Lev. 16; Heb. 9:7.

HYMN IV

Before the Fall, the Tree of Knowledge, with the commandment not to eat of it, had served as a boundary between Adam and God's glory; after the Fall, however, Adam is kept at a much greater distance, being henceforth prevented from entering Paradise at all by the "inviolable boundary" of the cherub's sharp sword (Genesis 3:24). Paradise now abhors Adam just as the Jewish Law abhorred the ritually unclean leper, keeping him outside the Israelite camp, but, just as the Law made provision for the leper's re-entry into Israelite society, so too Christ the High Priest provides for the restoration of Adam/humanity to Paradise.

1. The Just One saw how Adam had become audacious
because He had been lenient,
and He knew that he would overstep again
if He continued thus;
Adam had trampled down
that gentle and pleasant boundary,
so instead God made for him
a boundary guarded by force.
The mere words of the commandment
had been the boundary to the Tree,
but now the cherub and the sharp sword
provided the fence to Paradise.¹

RESPONSE: Deem me worthy that through Your grace
we may enter Your Paradise.

2. Adam in all his filth
sought to enter
that Holy of Holies
which loves only those who resemble it;

¹Gen. 3:24.

and because he made bold to enter
that inner tabernacle,
God did not allow him to enter
the outer one either.
When that sea full of life
saw a corpse in its midst,
it did not leave it there
but cast it forth.

3. Moses depicted the type
among the people of the Hebrews:
when a man becomes leprous
within the encampment
he is driven from its midst
and cast outside;
while if he sloughs off his leprosy
and makes supplication,²
the priest purifies him
with hyssop, blood and water,³
and he returns to his former abode
and enters into his inheritance.
4. Adam had been most pure
in that fair Garden,
but he became leprous and repulsive
because the serpent had breathed on him.
The Garden cast him from its midst;
all shining, it thrust him forth.
The High Priest,⁴ the Exalted One,
beheld him
cast out from Himself:
He stooped down and came to him,

²Lev. 13:46.

³Lev. 14: 1-9.

⁴cf Hebr. 9:11.

He cleansed him with hyssop,
and led him back to Paradise.

5. Adam had been naked and fair,
but his diligent wife
labored and made for him
a garment covered with stains.
The Garden, seeing him thus vile,
drove him forth.
Through Mary Adam had
another robe*
which adorned the thief;⁵
and when he became resplendent at Christ's
promise,
the Garden, looking on,
embraced him in Adam's place.
6. Moses who doubted
saw but did not enter
the land of God's promise;⁶
the Jordan served as a boundary.
Adam went astray and left
the Garden of Life;
the cherub became a fence.
Both boundaries were set
by the hand of our Lord,
but at the Resurrection they both entered:
Moses, into that land,
and Adam, into Paradise.
7. The tongue cannot relate
the description of innermost Paradise,
nor indeed does it suffice
for the beauties of the outer part;

⁵Luke 23:43.

⁶Deut. 32:50-52, 34:4.

for even the simple adornments
by the Garden's fence
cannot be related
in an adequate way.
For the colors of Paradise are full of joy,
its scents most wonderful,
its beauties most desirable,
and its delicacies glorious.

8. Even though the treasure
that adjoins the fence is lowly,
yet it surpasses all other treasures
in the world entire;
and by as much as the slopes, too,
are lowly in comparison
with that treasury
of the summit on high,
so the blessed state by the fence
is more glorious and exalted
than all that we experience as blessed,
who live in the valley below.
9. Be not angry that my tongue
has presumed to describe a theme
too great for it,
and so, through its own inadequacy, has
diminished that greatness.
As there is no mirror adequate
to reflect its beauty,
nor paints
which may portray it,
then may my attempt not be rejected,
for I have labored to compose
in my description of Paradise
a means whereby we may gain profit.

10. The mourner can find comfort therein,
the child be educated thereby,
the chaste become radiant through it,
the needy find provision from it.
And so let each one of them throw me
his little coin,*
and may they all make supplication for me
in Eden,
so that I may enter that place
whereof I have spoken in so far as I am able;
and so that the downcast may become desirous
of the riches that it promises.
11. May my purpose not be judged
by You, O Knower of all things;
may my search not be held blameworthy
by You, concealed from all;
for I have not made bold to speak
of Your generation, hidden from all;
in silence
I have bounded the Word.
Yet because I have honored Your birth,
allow me to dwell in Your Paradise.
From all who love You
be praise to Your hiddenness!

HYMN V

Although from one point of view the Biblical text may seem to be something static like a rock (Exodus 17:6), in fact this rock accompanies those who make use of it (1 Corinthians 10:4) and from it flow streams of vivifying water. St Ephrem goes on to describe his own experience of being transported to Paradise as he read the Paradise narrative of Genesis. A practical question then raises itself in his mind: is there going to

be enough space there for everyone at the final Resurrection? The analogy of a legion of demons inhabiting a single body (Mark 5:9), however, reminds him that the resurrected body will be of a different order from the physical, and so there is in fact no problem. As he is transported back into this world (stanza 11), he reflects on how misguided are those who weep to leave this world of sorrows when Paradise is so full of beauty (compare Hymn XIII).

1. I considered the Word of the Creator,
and likened it
to the rock that marched
with the people of Israel in the wilderness;¹
it was not from the reservoir
of water contained within it
that it poured forth for them
glorious streams:
there was no water in the rock,
yet oceans sprang forth from it;
just so did the Word
fashion created things* out of nothing.

RESPONSE: Blessed is that person accounted worthy
to inherit Your Paradise.

2. In his book Moses
described the creation of the natural world,
so that both Nature and Scripture
might bear witness to the Creator: *²
Nature, through man's use of it,
Scripture, through his reading of it.
These are the witnesses
which reach everywhere,

¹ 1 Cor. 10:4.

²cf John 8:17.

they are to be found at all times,
present at every hour,
confuting the unbeliever
who defames the Creator.

3. I read the opening of this book
and was filled with joy,
for its verses and lines
spread out their arms to welcome me;
the first rushed out and kissed me,
and led me on to its companion;
and when I reached that verse
wherein is written
the story of Paradise,
it lifted me up and transported me
from the bosom of the book
to the very bosom of Paradise.
4. The eye and the mind
traveled over the lines
as over a bridge, and entered together
the story of Paradise.
The eye as it read
transported the mind;
in return the mind, too,
gave the eye rest
from its reading,
for when the book had been read
the eye had rest,
but the mind was engaged.
5. Both the bridge and the gate
of Paradise
did I find in this book.
I crossed over and entered;

my eye indeed remained outside
but my mind entered within.
I began to wander
amid things not described.
This is a luminous height,
clear, lofty and fair:
Scripture named it Eden,³
the summit of all blessings.

6. There too did I see
the bowers of the just
dripping with unguents
and fragrant with scents,
garlanded with fruits,
crowned with blossoms.
In accord with a person's deeds
such was his bower;
thus one had few adornments,
while another was resplendent in its beauty;
one was but dim in its coloring,
while another dazzled in its glory.

7. I enquired into this too,
whether Paradise
was sufficient in size
for all the righteous to live there.
I asked about what is not written in Scripture,
but my instruction came from what is written
there:
"Consider the man
in whom there dwelt
a legion of all kinds of demons;⁴
they were there although not apparent,

³Gen. 2:8.

⁴Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30.

for their army is of a stuff finer and more subtle
than the soul itself.

8. That whole army
dwelt in a single body.
A hundred times finer
and more subtle
are the bodies of the righteous
when they are risen, at the Resurrection:
they resemble the mind
which is able,
if it so wills, to stretch out and expand,
or, should it wish, to contract and shrink;
if it shrinks, it is in some place,
if it expands, it is in every place.

9. Listen further
and learn
how lamps with thousands of rays
can exist in a single house,
how ten thousand scents
can exist in a single blossom;
though they exist within a small space,
they have ample room
to disport themselves.
So it is with Paradise:
though it is full of spiritual beings,
it is amply spacious for their disportment.

10. Again, thoughts,
infinite in number, dwell
even in the small space of the heart,*
yet they have ample room;
they neither constrict each other,
nor are they constricted there.

How much more will Paradise
the glorious
suffice for the spiritual beings
that are so refined in substance
that even thoughts
cannot touch them!"

11. I gave praise as far as I was able
and was on the point of departing
when, from the midst of Paradise,
there came a sudden thunderous sound,
and, like the blare of trumpets
in some camp,
a voice crying "holy"
thrice over.⁵
Thus I knew that the divinity
received praise in Paradise;
I had supposed it was empty,*
but I learn otherwise from the thunderous sound.
12. Paradise delighted me
as much by its peacefulness as by its beauty:
in it there resides a beauty
that has no spot;
in it exists a peacefulness
that knows no fear.
How blessed is that person
accounted worthy to receive it,
if not by right,
yet at least by grace;
if not because of good works,
yet at least through mercy.
13. I was in wonder as I crossed
the borders of Paradise

⁵Isaiah 6:3.

at how well-being, as though a companion,
turned round and remained behind.
And when I reached the shore of earth,
the mother of thorns,⁶
I encountered all kinds
of pain and suffering.
I learned how, compared to Paradise,
our abode is but a dungeon;
yet the prisoners within it
weep when they leave it!

14. I was amazed at how even infants
weep as they leave the womb—
weeping because they come out
from darkness into light
and from suffocation they issue forth
into this world!
Likewise death, too,
is for the world
a symbol of birth,
and yet people weep because they are born
out of this world, the mother of suffering,
into the Garden of splendors.*
15. Have pity on me,
O Lord of Paradise,
and if it is not possible for me
to enter Your Paradise,
grant that I may graze
outside, by its enclosure;
within, let there be spread
the table for the “diligent,”*
but may the fruits within its enclosure
drop outside like the “crumbs”⁷

⁶Gen. 3:18.

⁷Matt. 15:27 and parallels.

for sinners, so that, through Your grace,
they may live!

HYMN VI

It is only when studied within the context of Orthodox belief ("the keys of doctrine," stanza 1) that the Scriptures become truly meaningful, allowing the reader/hearer of the Paradise narrative to experience something of what Paradise is really like. In stanzas 4-5 St Ephrem describes just such an experience of the Garden's delights, and this simply serves to deepen his awe and wonder at the original state of Adam and Eve, for whose sake Paradise had been created. The Church now corresponds to Paradise, and this correspondence can be understood from two different aspects. On the one hand, we are ourselves undergoing the same period of testing that Adam and Eve underwent: whereas they were required to be obedient to the commandment not to eat of the Tree, we are now required to be obedient to Christ, whose fruit we are actually permitted to eat daily (stanza 8); once again all depends on our interior disposition and the proper exercise of the gift of free will. On the other hand, those who have successfully exercised this free will and have listened to Christ already experience the eschatological Paradise, and indeed themselves constitute fruits even more glorious than those of Paradise's own trees. This being so, the saints still on earth can be seen as revealing Paradise to the rest of humanity. This state of affairs indeed applied already under the Old Covenant, and it is from this that St Ephrem enumerates a series of examples with which the poem concludes.

1. The keys of doctrine
 which unlock all of Scripture's books,
have opened up before my eyes
 the book of creation,

the treasure house of the Ark,
the crown of the Law.
This is a book which, above its companions,
has in its narrative
made the Creator perceptible
and transmitted His actions;
it has envisioned all His craftsmanship,
made manifest His works of art.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who through His Cross
has flung open Paradise.

2. Scripture brought me
to the gate of Paradise,
and the mind, which is spiritual,
stood in amazement and wonder as it entered,
the intellect grew dizzy and weak
as the senses were no longer able
to contain its treasures—
so magnificent they were—
or to discern its savors
and find any comparison for its colors,
or take in its beauties
so as to describe them in words.
3. Paradise surrounds the limbs
with its many delights:
the eyes, with its handiwork,
the hearing, with its sounds,
the mouth and the nostrils,
with its tastes and scents.
Blessed is that person who has gathered for himself
the company of all
who have kept vigil and fasted;
they, in return for their fasts,

shall delight to graze
upon its luxurious pastures.

4. Paradise raised me up as I perceived it,
it enriched me as I meditated upon it;
I forgot my poor estate,
for it had made me drunk with its fragrance.
I became as though no longer my old self,
for it renewed me with all its varied nature.
I swam around
in its magnificent waves;
and in the place that, burning like a furnace,
had made Adam naked,
I became so inebriated
that I forgot all my sins there.
5. Although I was not sufficient
for all the waves of its beauty,
Paradise took me up and cast me
into a sea still greater;
in its fair beauty I beheld
those who are far more beautiful than it,
and I reflected:
if Paradise be so glorious,
how much more glorious should Adam be,
who is in the image¹ of its Planter,
and how much fairer the Cross,
upon which the Son of its Lord rode.*
6. It was not Paradise
that gave rise to the creation of mankind;
rather, it was for Adam alone
that Paradise had been planted,
for to its buds Adam's heart is superior,
to its fruits his words,

¹Gen. 1:27.

because rational speech has more savor
than the produce of Paradise;
truth in mankind
surpasses its plants,*
and love is likewise more comely
than its sweet scents.

7. God planted the fair Garden,
He built the pure Church;²
upon the Tree of Knowledge
He established the injunction.
He gave joy, but they took no delight,
He gave admonition, but they were unafraid.
In the Church He implanted
the Word
which causes rejoicing with its promises,
which causes fear with its warnings:
he who despises the Word, perishes,
he who takes warning, lives.
8. The assembly of saints
bears resemblance to Paradise:
in it each day is plucked
the fruit* of Him who gives life to all;
in it, my brethren, is trodden
the cluster of grapes, to be the Medicine of Life.
The serpent is crippled and bound
by the curse,³
while Eve's mouth is sealed
with a silence that is beneficial⁴
—but it also serves once again
as a harp to sing the praises of her Creator.

²Eph. 5:27.

³Gen. 3:14.

⁴1 Cor. 14:34.

9. Among the saints none is naked,
for they have put on glory,
nor is any clad in those leaves
or standing in shame,
for they have found, through our Lord,
the robe that belongs to Adam and Eve.
As the Church
purges her ears
of the serpent's poison,
those who had lost their garments,
having listened to it and become diseased,
have now been renewed and whitened.*
10. The effortless power,
the arm which never tires,
planted this Paradise,
adorned it without effort.
But it is the effort of free will
that adorns the Church with all manner of fruits.
The Creator saw the Church
and was pleased;
He resided in that Paradise
which she had planted for His honor,
just as He had planted the Garden
for her delight.
11. The diligent carry their own fruits
and now run forward
to meet Paradise
as it exults with every sort of fruit.
They enter that Garden
with glorious deeds,
and it sees
that the fruits of the just
surpass in their excellence
the fruits of its own trees,

- and that the adornments of the victorious
outrival its own.
12. Happy indeed is the person accounted worthy
to behold in Paradise
the glorious fruits of the trees
which so surpass—
but which then take second place
once they behold the fruits of the victorious!
The flowers of Paradise took the victory,
but then were vanquished
at the sight of the blossoms
of the celibate and chaste*
at whose garlands
both creation and its Creator rejoice.
13. The fruits of the righteous
were more pleasing to the Knower of all
than the fruits
and produce of the trees.
The beauty that exists in nature
extolled the human mind,
and Paradise lauded
the intellect;
the flowers gave praise to virtuous life,
the Garden to free will,
and the earth to human thought.
Blessed is He who made Adam so great!
14. More fitting to be told
than the glorious account
of Paradise
are the exploits of the victorious
who adorned themselves
with the very likeness of Paradise;

in them is depicted
the beauty of the Garden.
Let us take leave of the trees
and tell of the victors,
instead of the inheritance
let us celebrate the inheritors.

15. If the beauty of Paradise
strikes us with astonishment,
how much more should we be astonished
at beauty of the mind:
one is the product of nature,
the other of the will.
Free will was envious
of the Garden
and from itself brought forth
victorious fruits
whose crowns vanquish
the very spendors of Paradise.
16. There, manifest and fair
to the eye of the mind,
are the coveted banquets of the just
who summon us
to be their companions and brothers,
their fellow members.
Let us not be deprived, my brethren,
of their company;
let us be their kindred,
or failing that, their neighbors,
and if not in their own dwelling,
at least round about their bowers.
17. How enviable is that person
held worthy of their treasures' wealth,

how blessed is that person
held worthy of even the dregs of their riches.
O make me worthy of that least part
which comes from there;
may the enemy see me
and be stricken with gloom,
for he imagined he would see me
in the place he had made ready for me;
may he now behold me in that place
which Your mercy has prepared for me!

18. Blessed is the person who is worthy
to look upon their raiment,
blessed is the person who is worthy
and has heard their wisdom,
blessed are the ears
that have drunk to the full of their voices,
blessed is the person who has achieved
their blessed state,
blessed the person who has toiled
to be among the first,
woe to him who made no effort
even to be among the last.⁵
19. Blessed indeed is that person on whose behalf
they have interceded before the Good One,
woe to him whom they have opposed
before the Just One.
Those whom the Good One loves shall be in Eden,
those whom the Just rejects, in Sheol.*
The city against which they have shaken off
the dust from their shoes
will be in worse plight than Sodom;⁶
but in the house where they have prayed

⁵Matt. 20:8 and parallels.

⁶Matt. 10:14-15 and parallels.

the dead will come to life⁷
and peace will reside throughout.

20. They went down to Egypt
and provided food when famine reigned;⁸
they came to the obstinate sea,
and taught it wisdom with a rod;⁹
they went out into the hostile desert
and adorned it with the pillar;¹⁰
they entered the furnace,
fiercely heated,¹¹
and sprinkled it with their dew;¹²
into the pit where they had been thrown
an angel entered
and taught its wild beasts to fast.¹³

21. The Salt that seasoned itself
to prevent losing its savor¹⁴
had been scattered all over the world
by the hand of the Creator.
Just as His hand took from every quarter*
and created Adam,
so has he now been scattered
in every quarter.
The hand now gathers what had been scattered,
and scatters what had been gathered,
for progression is from the universe to Adam,
and then from him to the universe.

⁷cf Acts 20:9-12.

⁸Gen. 41:54-57.

⁹Exod. 14:16.

¹⁰Exod. 14:19.

¹¹Dan. 3:19-28.

¹²Dan. 3:50.

¹³Dan. 6:22.

¹⁴Matt. 5:13 and parallels.

22. The East has grown luminous with the saints,
with them the West has become brilliant,
the North is raised up by them,
from them the South has learned.
They have ascended to the firmament and opened it,¹⁵
they have gone down to the sea and explored it;¹⁶
the mystery that the apostle revealed
in a parable
have they extended to all humankind,
reaching every corner;¹⁷
all creation has embraced it
to draw strength from it.
23. One of them cleft
the air with his chariot;¹⁸
the Watchers rejoiced as they met him,
seeing that a body
had lately taken up its abode among them;
and just as an earthly being
ascended in a chariot
and put on splendor,
so did the Lord, in His grace,
descend and put on a body;
He then mounted a cloud and ascended¹⁹
to reign over high and low.
24. The Watchers* of fire and spirit
stood in wonder at Elias,
seeing hidden within him
the sweet treasure;

¹⁵cf 2 Cor. 12:3.

¹⁶cf 2 Cor. 11:25.

¹⁷cf Rom. 16:25-26, Col. 1:25-26.

¹⁸Elias (Elijah): 2 Kings 2:11.

¹⁹Acts 1:9.

in wonder at one formed of earth,
they gave thanks to his Fashioner.
Seeing his virginity
they exulted,
for it had exalted those below
and caused wonder to those above,
its contest being on earth,
its crown in Paradise.

25. With love and instruction,
commingled with truth,
the intellect can grow
and become rich with new things,
as it meditates with discernment
on the treasure store of hidden mysteries.
For my part, I have loved, and so learned,
and become assured
that Paradise possesses
the haven of the victorious.
As I have been held worthy to perceive it,
so make me worthy to enter it!

HYMN VII

Whereas Adam and Eve had just God's commandment, we also have His promise; let this serve as a source of comfort in times of temptation. The examples of the saints, whose fruits are even fairer than those of Paradise, are there too to encourage us; so varied are the lives of the saints that everyone will find some special example among them to rejoice in and to follow. St Ephrem concludes on a characteristic personal note: contemplation of the saints also serves to rebuke him for his own sins and to make him reflect how, in seeking to please our fellow human beings rather than God, we have all too often exchanged freedom for slavery.

1. In times of temptation
 console yourselves with God's promises,
 for there is no deceit
 in the word of Him who repays all,
 and His treasure house is not so paltry
 that we should doubt His promise;
 He has surrendered His own Son for us
 so that we might believe in Him;
 His Body is with us,
 His assurance is with us,
 He came and gave us His keys,
 since it is for us that His treasures lie waiting.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who, with His keys,
 has opened up the Garden of Life.

2. In the evening the world sleeps,
 closing its eyes,
 while in the morning it arises.
 He who repays is distant
 as it were but a night's length away;
 now light dawns and He is coming.
 Weary not, my brethren,
 nor suppose
 that your struggle will last long,
 or that your resurrection is far off,
 for our death is already behind us,
 and our resurrection before us.
3. Bear up, O life of mourning,*
 so that you may attain to Paradise;
 its dew will wash off your squalor,
 while what it exudes will render you fragrant;
 its support will afford rest after your toil,
 its crown will give you comfort,

it will proffer you fruits
in your hunger,
fruits that purify those who partake of them;
in your thirst
it will provide for you a celestial draught,
one that makes wise those who drink of it.

4. Blessed is the poor man
who gazes on that place;
riches are poured in profusion
outside and around it;
chalcedony and other gems¹
lie there cast out
to prevent their defiling
the glorious earth of Paradise;
should someone place there
precious stones or beryls,
these would appear ugly and dull
compared with that dazzling land.
5. Both men and women
are clothed in raiment of light;
the garments provided to cover their nakedness
are swallowed up in glory;
all the limbs' vile emotions
are silenced,
the fountains of lust
are stopped up,
anger is removed
and the soul purified
and, like wheat, it flourishes in Eden,
unchoked by thorns.
6. There virginity dances
because the serpent,

¹cf Ezek. 28:13.

who secretly poured venom into her ears,
is now destroyed;
the fig rushes up to her
and full of joy exclaims:
“Put away your ignorant
childhood—
the day when you became naked
and hid in my bosom.
Praise to Him who has clothed
your nakedness with the robe!”

7. There youth exults
because of what it has achieved;
in Paradise it beholds
Joseph who stripped off*
and cast away the lust
that flared up among the senseless;²
it sees too the child who overcame the asp
in its hole.³
Samson overcame a lion,
but a viper conquered
and smote him, causing him straightway to lose
his Nazirite locks.⁴
8. There the married state
finds rest after having been anguished
by the pangs of giving birth, brought on by the curse,⁵
and by the pain of childbearing;
now it sees the children
whom it had buried amid laments,
pasturing like lambs
in Eden;

²Gen. 39:10.

³Isaiah 11:8.

⁴Judges 14:6, 16:16-19.

⁵Gen. 3:16.

exalted in their ranks,
glorious in their splendors,
they are like kindred
of the spotless angels.

9. Thanks be to the Merciful One
who plucked them while still young—
the children who are
the late fruits
to become in Paradise
the first fruits* of all.

A novel sight may be seen there:
these “fruits” pluck
the fruiting produce,
the firstlings pluck the firstfruits.
In their purity both plucked
and plucker are alike.

10. Bind up your thoughts, Old Age,
in Paradise
whose fragrance makes you young;
its wafting scent rejuvenates you,
and your stains are swallowed up
in the beauty with which it clothes you.
In Moses He depicted for you
a parable:
his cheeks, ashen with age,
became shining and fair,⁶
a symbol of old age
that in Eden again becomes young.

11. No blemish is in them,
for they are without wickedness;

⁶Exod. 34:29.

no anger is in them,
for they have no fiery temper;
no mocking scorn is in them,
for they are without guile.
They do not race to do harm—
and so themselves be harmed;
they show no hatred there,
for there they are without envy;
they pronounce no judgment there,
for there no oppression exists.

12. People behold themselves
in glory
and wonder at themselves,
discovering where they are.
The nature of their bodies,
once troubled and troublesome,
is now tranquil and quiet,
resplendent
from without in beauty,
and from within with purity,
the body in evident ways,
the soul in hidden ways.
13. In Paradise the cripples,
who had never walked, leap around;
the deformed, who had never even crawled,
fly about through the air;
the eyes of the blind and deaf,
who had yearned from the womb,
hungering for the light
which they had failed to see,
now rejoice to behold
the beauty of Paradise,
and the mighty sound of its harps
gives comfort to their ears.

14. At him who has uttered
no curse or abuse
does Paradise's blessing
rejoice all the more;
upon him whose eyes' glance
remained always chaste
does Paradise's beauty
gaze the more;
in the limbs of him
who quelled the venom of his thoughts
do its springs of sweetness
well up.
15. The virgin who rejected
the marriage crown that fades
now has the radiant marriage chamber
that cherishes the children of light,
shining out because she rejected
the works of darkness.
To her who was alone
in a lonely house
the wedding feast now grants tranquility:
here angels rejoice,
prophets delight,
and apostles add splendor.
16. Fasters, who have chosen Daniel's
meager diet of vegetables⁷
—and before Daniel kings with their crowns
bowed down and did reverence—
fasters like these do the trees,
not kings, extol,
bowing down in all their beauty
and inviting them

⁷Dan. 1:12.

to turn aside to the place where they grow,
and take up their abode amid their boughs,
bathe in their dew
and rejoice in their fruits.

17. Whoever has washed the feet of the saints
will himself be cleansed in that dew;
to the hand that has stretched out
to give to the poor
will the fruits of the trees
themselves stretch out;
the very footsteps of him
who visited the sick in their affliction
do the flowers make haste
to crown with blooms,
jostling to see
which can be first to kiss his steps.
18. The man who abstained,
with understanding, from wine,
will the vines of Paradise
rush out to meet, all the more joyfully,
as each one stretches out and proffers him
its clusters;
or if any has lived
a life of virginity,
him too they welcome into their bosom,
for the solitary such as he
has never lain in any bosom
nor upon any marriage bed.*
19. Those who have been crowned for our Lord's sake
with the martyr's death by the sword
shine out in glory there
with their crowns

because their bodies despised
the persecutors' fire.
Like stars⁸ do they blossom
in Paradise,
those seven sons of light*
with their radiant mother,
who, in their deaths,
spurned the wrath of the impious king.⁹

20. The happiness of this place
gives joy to the women who labored
in the service of the saints:
there they see that widow
who took in Elias¹⁰
savor Eden's delights;
instead of those two fountains
—the jar and the cruse—
which gave her her livelihood,
now the boughs of the trees
provide this in Eden
for all women who have given livelihood to the
poor.

21. Nothing there in Paradise
is useless*:
both grass and roots
bring benefit and profit;
whoever tastes them is rejuvenated,
whoever breathes in their scent grows fair;
in the bosom of its blossoms and flowers
is hidden

⁸Dan. 12:3.

⁹2 Macc. 7.

¹⁰1 Kings 17:14.

a veritable treasure,
a gift for those who pluck it;
the fruits of Paradise bear rich wealth
for those who gather them.

22. None toil there,
for none go hungry there;
none endure shame there,
for none do wrong there;
none feel contrition there,
for there is no cause to repent there.
Those who run the course
find rest and quiet.
None grow old there,
for none die there;
none are buried there,
for none are born there.
23. They know no worry,
for they have no suffering;
they have no fear,
for no snare awaits them;
they have no adversary,
for they have passed through the contest.
They count themselves
blessed
unendingly,
for their warfare is over;
they have taken up their crowns
and found rest in their new abode.
24. I saw that place, my brethren,
and I sat down and wept,
for myself and for those like me,
at how my days have reached their fill,

dissipated one by one, faded out,¹¹
stolen away without my noticing;
remorse seizes hold of me
because I have lost
crown, name* and glory,
robe and bridal chamber of light.
How blessed is the person
who of that heavenly table is held worthy!

25. May all the children of light
make supplication for me there,
that our Lord may grant them
the gift of a single soul.
Thus would I have renewed occasion
to praise Him
whose hand is, to be sure,
stretched out in readiness.
May He who gives
both in justice and in grace
give to me, in His mercy,
of the treasure store of His mercies.

26. And if none who is defiled
can enter that place,
then allow me to live by its enclosure,
residing in its shade.
Since Paradise resembles
that table,
let me, through Your grace,
eat of the "crumbs" of its fruit
which fall outside,
so that I too may join
those dogs who had their fill
from the crumbs of their masters' tables.¹²

¹¹cf Ps. 89(90):9

¹²Matt. 15:27 and parallels.

27. And may I learn how much I will then have received
from that parable of the Rich Man¹³
who did not even give to the poor man
the leftovers from his banquet;
and may I see Lazarus,
grazing in Paradise,
and look upon the Rich Man,
in anguish,
so that the might of justice outside
may cause me fear,
but the breath of grace within
may bring me comfort.
28. Allow me to dwell by the enclosure
of that Garden, so that I may be
a neighbor to those within,
envied by those outside.
Yet who is able to look, at the same time,
on delight and torment,
to behold both Gehenna
and the Garden?
May the crown of those within
rebuke me for all my sins;
may the punishment of those without
teach me how great is Your mercy toward me.
29. Who can endure
to look on both sides,
whose ears can stand
the terrible cries of the wicked,
who proclaim, in Gehenna,
that the Just One is righteous,
while the good utter praise
in the Garden?

¹³Luke 16:19.

The two sides gaze on each other
in amazement,
the works of each side, revealed,
serve to admonish the other.

30. May my sins not be revealed
to my brethren on that day,
—yet by this we show
how contemptible we are, Lord;
if our sins are revealed to You,
from whom can we hide them?
I have made shame
an idol for myself;
grant me, Lord, to fear You,
for You are mighty.
May I feel shame and self-reproach
before You, for You are gentle.
31. A man's neighbor has become his god:
every moment he seeks to please him;
if he does wrong, he feels shame before him,
if he does him an injury, he is afraid;
or if he does him some good,
then he has spoiled that good by his thirst for
praise.
Such a man has become an abject slave
in all these ways.
The Good One gave us freedom,
but we have reduced this to slavery.
May we exchange, for Your lordship,
this overlord we have made for ourselves!

HYMN VIII

St Ephrem takes comfort from the last minute repentance of the Good Thief, but this leads him on to a quandary concerning the relationship of the soul to the body in Paradise. Although he finds himself unable to offer any way out of the problems raised by Christ's words, "this day you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43), St Ephrem is quite clear in his mind that the soul cannot enter Paradise without the body, and so the righteous cannot in fact enter Paradise until the final Resurrection, when the body and soul will eventually be reunited; in the meantime the disembodied souls await the Resurrection just outside the boundary of Paradise in a state that other Syriac writers describe as "the sleep of the soul."

1. There came to my ear
 from the Scripture which had been read
a word that caused me joy
 on the subject of the Thief;¹
it gave comfort to my soul
 amidst the multitude of its vices,
telling how He had compassion on the Thief.
 O may He bring me too
into that Garden at the sound of whose name
 I am overwhelmed by joy;
my mind bursts its reins
 as it goes forth to contemplate Him.

RESPONSE: Hold me worthy that we may become
 heirs in Your kingdom.

2. I behold a dwelling there
 and a tabernacle of light,

¹Luke 23:39-43.

a voice proclaiming
"Blessed is the Thief
who has freely received
the keys to Paradise."
I imagined that he was already there,
but then I considered
how the soul cannot
have perception of Paradise
without its mate, the body,
its instrument and lyre.

3. In this place of joys
anguish seized me
as I realized that it is not profitable
to delve into hidden things.
With respect to the Thief
a dilemma beset me:
if the soul were able
to see and to hear
without its body,
why then is it confined therein?
And if the body is no longer alive,
why should the soul be put to death with it?
4. That the soul cannot see
without the body's frame,
the body itself persuades,
since if the body becomes blind
the soul is blind in it,
groping about with it;
see how each looks
and attests to the other,
how the body has need of the soul
in order to live,
and the soul too requires the body
in order to see and to hear.

5. If the body grows deaf,
 the soul does too,
 and it grows delirious
 when the body reels with sickness.
 Though the soul exists
 of itself and for itself,
 yet without its companion
 it lacks true existence;
 it fully resembles an embryo
 still in the womb,
 whose existence is as yet
 bereft of word or thought.
6. If the soul, while in the body,
 resembles an embryo
 and is unable to know
 either itself or its companion,
 how much more feeble will it then be
 once it has left the body,
 no longer possessing on its own
 the senses
 which are able to serve
 as tools for it to use.
 For it is through the senses of its companion
 that it shines forth and becomes evident.
7. That blessed abode
 is in no way deficient,
 for that place is complete and perfected
 in every way,
 and the soul cannot
 enter there alone,
 for in such a state it is in everything
 deficient—
 in sensation and consciousness;
 but on the day of Resurrection

the body, with all its senses,
will enter in as well, once it has been made perfect.

8. When the hand of the Creator
fashioned and formed the body
so that it might sing hymns
to its Maker,
this lyre was silent
and had not voice,
until at last

He breathed into it
the soul which sang therein.

Thus the strings acquired sound,
and the soul, by means of the body,
acquired speech to utter wisdom.

9. When Adam
was in all things complete,
then the Lord took him
and placed him in Paradise.
The soul could not enter there
of itself and for itself,
but together they entered,
body and soul,
pure and perfect to that perfect place—
and together they left it, once they had become
sullied.

From all this we should learn
that at the Resurrection they will enter again
together.

10. Adam was heedless
as guardian of Paradise,
for the crafty thief
stealthily entered;

leaving aside the fruit
—which most men would covet—
he stole instead
the Garden's inhabitant!
Adam's Lord came out to seek him;
He entered Sheol and found him there,
then led and brought him out
to set him once more in Paradise.

11. Thus in the delightful mansions
on the borders of Paradise
do the souls of the just
and righteous reside,
awaiting there
the bodies they love,
so that, at the opening
of the Garden's gate,
both bodies and souls might proclaim,
amidst Hosannas,
“Blessed is He who has brought Adam from Sheol
and returned him to Paradise in the company of
many.”²

HYMN IX

St Ephrem now turns to the joys of Paradise which the righteous will experience at the Resurrection; these can only be described by means of both analogy and contrast with life on earth. Just as air is essential for all life here, so too in Paradise is it the spiritual counterpart of air which sustains all transfigured existence there (throughout this hymn one should recall that in Syriac the term *ruha* means both “wind” and “spirit/Spirit”). In order to appreciate the spiritual beauty

²cf Matt. 27:52.

of Paradise we need to refine and purify our vision; provided we do this, God will meet our desire for Him in whatever way is most appropriate for each individual.

1. In the world there is struggle,
in Eden, a crown of glory.
at our resurrection
both earth and heaven will God renew,¹
liberating all creatures,
granting them paschal joy, along with us.
Upon our mother Earth, along with us,²
did He lay disgrace
when He placed on her, with the sinner, the curse;
so, together with the just, will He bless her too;
this nursing mother, along with her children,
shall He who is Good renew.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who, in His Paradise,
gives joy to our gloom.

2. The evil one mixed his cup,
proffering its bitterness to all;
in everyone's path has he set his snares,
for everyone has he spread out his net;
he has caused tares to spring up
in order to choke the good seed.³
But in His glorious Paradise
He who is Good
will sweeten their bitter trials,
their crowns He will make great;

¹Isaiah 65:17, 66:22.

²cf Rom. 8:21.

³Matt. 13:25 and parallels.

because they have borne their crosses⁴
He will escort them into Eden.

3. Should you wish
to climb up a tree,
with its lower branches
it will provide steps before your feet,
eager to make you recline
in its bosom above,
on the couch of its upper branches.
So arranged is the surface of these branches,
bent low and cupped
—while yet dense with flowers—
that they serve as a protective womb
for whoever rests there.
4. Who has ever beheld such a banquet
in the very bosom of a tree,
with fruit of every savor
ranged for the hand to pluck.
Each type of fruit in due sequence approaches,
each awaiting its turn:
fruit to eat,
and fruit to quench the thirst;
to rinse the hands there is dew,
and leaves to dry them with after
—a treasure store which lacks nothing,
whose Lord is rich in all things.
5. Around the trees the air is limpid
as the saints recline;
below them are blossoms,
above them fruit;
fruits serve as their sky,
flowers as their earth.

⁴Matt. 10:38 and parallels.

Who has ever heard of
or seen
a cloud of fruits providing shade
for the head,
or a garment of flowers
spread out beneath the feet?

6. Such is the flowing brook of delights
that, as one tree takes leave of you,
the next one beckons to you;
all of them rejoice
that you should partake of the fruit of one
and suck the juice of another,
wash and cleanse yourself
in the dew of yet a third;
anoint yourself with the resin of one
and breathe another's fragrance,
listen to the song of still another.
Blessed is He who gave joy to Adam!

7. Scented breezes blow
with varied force;
like Martha and Mary,
they hasten with delicate foods,
for the guests at this banquet
never have to depart at all.
Weary Martha⁵
made so bold
as to complain to Him
who invites us to His Paradise
where those who minister
never weary in their service.

⁵Luke 10:40.

8. The breezes of Paradise
 hasten to attend to the just:
one blows satiety,
 another quenches the thirst;
this one is laden with goodness,
 that one with all that is rich.
Who has ever beheld breezes
 acting as waiters,
some offering foods,
 others diverse drinks,
one breathing dew,
 another fragrant scents?
9. In a spiritual way do these breezes
 suckle spiritual beings:
this is a feast where no hand labors
 or ever grows tired;
the teeth do not weary,
 the stomach never grows heavy.
Who has ever reclined and enjoyed himself
 without anyone slaving away?
Who has eaten to satisfaction without any food,
 or drunk and become merry without any drink?
10. In seedlings you can observe
 symbols clearly marked.
When the wind gives suck
 to wheat and to the ears of corn,
it nourishes them as it blows,
 by its force it fattens them up.
How much more should those winds
 full of blessing
give suck to the seedlings of Paradise
 which are both rational and spiritual?
For that which is spiritual
 has the Spirit's breath as its nourishment.

11. Breezes full of discernment
nourish the discerning;
this breeze provides you with nourishment in
abundance,
that one delights you as it blows,
one causes your countenance to shine,
while another gives you enjoyment.
Who has ever experienced
delight in this way,
eating, without employing his hands,
drinking, without using his mouth?
As both cupbearer and baker
do these delightful breezes act.
12. Even today on this earth of thorns⁶
we can see in the field
the spikes of wheat which God,
despite those curses, has given:
cradled within them, the grains receive their birth,
thanks to the wind;
at the good will of the Most High,
who can perform all things,
does the breeze suckle them,
like a mother's breast it nurtures them,
so that herein may be depicted a type
of how spiritual beings are nourished.
13. If the grain of wheat
which gives sustenance to our bodies
(though most of it, as refuse,
the body evacuates)
—if the grain is nourished by the air,
fattened by the wind,

⁶Gen. 3:18.

how much more, in their refinement,
can the breezes
from Eden's treasure store
bestow on spiritual beings
etherial juices
and foods that are spiritual.

14. Learn too from the fire
how the air's breath is all-nourishing;
if fire is confined
in a place without air,
its flame starts to flicker
as it gasps for breath.
Who has ever beheld
a mother give suck
with her whole being to everything?
Upon her hangs the whole universe,
while she depends on the One
who is that Power which nourishes all.
15. The Chaldeans* are thus put to shame:
for they exalted the stars,
saying that it is they alone
which give to the world all its nourishment.
But it is the air which gives suck
unstintingly
to the stars as well as to seedlings,
to reptiles and to man.
This we are taught by the fire
which itself is nourished by air,
—and fire has a close affinity
with those heavenly luminaries.
16. For if the soul
flies away when air is absent—

since air is the body's pillar
upon which our frame is supported,
being the bread of our bread,
on which our own "field" grows fat—
how much the more, then,
can this blessed air
give to spiritual beings pleasure
as they partake and drink of it,
fly about and swim in it—
this veritable ocean of delights?

17. Instead of bread, it is the very fragrance of Paradise
that gives nourishment;
instead of liquid,
this life-giving breeze does service:
the senses delight
in its luxuriant waves
which surge up
in endless variety,
with joyous intensity.
Being unburdened,
the senses stand in awe and delight
before the divine Majesty.
18. Today our bodies grow hungry
and have to be fed,
but yonder it is souls,
instead of bodies, that crave food.
The soul receives sustenance
appropriate to its needs;
it is by the Nourisher of all
that the soul receives its fill,
and not by any other
variety of food;
it pastures on His beauties,
full of wonder at His treasures.

19. Bodies,
 with their flow of blood,
receive refinement there
 after the manner of souls;
the soul that is heavy
 has its wings refined
so that they resemble
 resplendent thought.
Thought, too, whose movements
 are ever in a state of disturbance,
will become unperturbed,
 after the pattern of that Majesty.
20. Far more glorious than the body
 is the soul,
and more glorious still than the soul
 is the spirit,
but more hidden than the spirit
 is the Godhead.
At the end
 the body will put on
the beauty of the soul,
 the soul will put on that of the spirit,
while the spirit shall put on
 the very likeness of God's majesty.
21. For bodies shall be raised
 to the level of souls,
and the soul
 to that of the spirit,
while the spirit will be raised
 to the height of God's majesty;
clinging to both awe
 and love,
it neither circles too high,
 nor holds back too much,

it discerns when to hold back,
so that its flight is beneficial.

22. But if you are greedy
Moses will reproach you;
he took no provisions
as he ascended to the mountain summit;⁷
he was richly sustained because he hungered,
he shone with much beauty because he thirsted.
Who has ever beheld
a famished man
devour a vision and grow beautiful,
imbibe a voice and be sustained?
Nourished with the divine glory
he grew and shone forth.

23. All that we eat
the body eventually expels
in a form that disgusts us;
we are repelled by its smell.
The burden of food debilitates us,
in excess it proves harmful,
but if it be joy
which inebriates and sustains,
how greatly will the soul be sustained
on the waves of this joy
as its faculties suck
the breast of all wisdom.

24. Torrents of delight
flow down through the First Born
from the radiance of the Father
upon the gathering of seers:

⁷Exod. 34.

they indulge themselves there
upon the pasture of divine visions.
Who has ever beheld the hungry
find satisfaction,
fare sumptuously and become inebriated
on waves of glory
flowing from the beauty
of that sublime Beauty?

25. The Lord of all
is the treasure store of all things:
upon each according to his capacity
He bestows a glimpse
of the beauty of His hiddenness,
of the splendor of His majesty.
He is the radiance who, in his love,
makes everyone shine
—the small, with flashes of light from Him,
the perfect, with rays more intense,
but only His Child is sufficient
for the might of His glory.
26. Accordingly as each here on earth
purifies his eye for Him,
so does he become more able to behold
His incomparable glory;
accordingly as each here on earth
opens his ear to Him,
so does he become more able to grasp
His wisdom;
accordingly as each here on earth
prepares a receptacle for Him,
so is he enabled to carry
a small portion of His riches.

27. The Lord who is beyond measure
measures out nourishment to all,
adapting to our eyes the sight of Himself,
to our hearing His voice,
His blessing to our appetite,
His wisdom to our tongue.
At His gift
blessings swarm,
for this is always new in its savor,
wonderfully fragrant,
adaptable in its strength,
resplendent in its colors.
28. Who has ever beheld gatherings of people
whose sustenance is the giving of praise?
Their raiment is light,
their countenance full of radiance;
as they ruminate
on the abundance of His gift
there burst forth from their mouths
springs of wisdom;
tranquility reigns over their thought,
truth over their knowledge,
reverence over their enquiry,
and love over their offering of praise.
29. Grant, Lord, that I and those dear to me
may together there
find the very last remnants⁸
of Your gift!
Just the sight of Your Dear One
is a fountain of delight;
whoever is worthy
to be ravished thereby

⁸Mark 8:8.

will despise ordinary food;
all who look upon You
will be sustained by Your beauty.
Praises be to Your splendor!

HYMN X

St Ephrem here contrasts the climate of Paradise, and its cycle of seasons, with that of our earth. The earth's climate, with its unruly storms during the bitterly cold winter months and the torrid heat of the summer, shares in the fallen character of humanity on earth, and so is incompatible with Paradise. In Paradise, by contrast, the months follow a gentle and orderly cycle of seasonal produce, and within each month the waxing and waning of the moon governs the development of plant life, a development which Ephrem compares to the human life cycle (in order to emphasize his theme of rejuvenation, he lists the course of the human cycle in reverse, starting with the aged and ending up with the child as yet unborn).

For penitent sinners living on the slopes below, mere proximity to Paradise has a healing effect. This thought however, makes Ephrem wonder whether he is not overbold in positing such a place in the eschatological Paradise situated "between the Garden and Hell's fire"; but in the final stanza he takes comfort in the thought that, as God's divine cloud hovers over the whole of creation, good and bad alike, so too the dew of his overflowing compassion will reach even to Gehenna in its effects.

1. What mouth
has ever described Paradise,

what tongue
has told of its glory,
what mind has depicted
its beauty?
Indeed its hidden recesses
cannot be scrutinized;
I can only marvel at what is visible,
at those things which lie outside Paradise,
and so I realize how far I remain
from its hidden secrets.

RESPONSE: Grant us to see Your righteous ones in
Your Paradise.

2. In the temperate atmosphere
that surrounds its outer boundary
the months that pass by there
are also temperate:
there dismal February
resembles radiant May,
January with its
icy blasts
is like August with its fruits;
June is like April
and torrid July
has September's dews.
3. Our feeble months take on Eden's delights*
in the atmosphere
that surrounds Eden,
for Eden makes them like itself.
The months blossom with flowers
all around Paradise
in order to weave
throughout every season

a wreath of blossom
to embellish the slopes of Paradise,
being themselves not worthy
to provide a crown for the summit.

4. Because the months
are stricken by storms
they cannot enter Paradise,
so still in its tranquility.
If all the months' tempests
are overcome
in that atmosphere
outside Paradise,
how can they pollute
the glorious air
whose heavenly* breath
restores humanity to life?
5. The air of this earth
is wanton as a prostitute
with whom the twelve months
consort:
each one in turn
makes her comply with its own whims
while she produces fruits
from them all;
whereas the chaste* and pure air
of Paradise
is unpolluted in its purity
by the dalliance of the months.
6. There the abundant flow
of their produce is ceaseless,
for each month bears its own fruit,
its neighbor, flowers.

There the springs of delights
open up and flow
with wine, milk, honey
and cream.

Grass flourishes in December,
after it January produces wheat;
February, divested of its cold and now radiant,
bears sheaves in Paradise.

7. The months are divided
into four groups:
the firstfruits show themselves
in the first three months,
in the next three
come the luscious soft fruits,
the seventh to ninth months
ripen
the late fruits,
while at the end, the year's crown,
the pregnant buds
are bursting forth with joy.
8. The phases of the moon
produce variation in the flowers;
at the beginning of the months
the branches open up their buds*;
at full moon they blossom,
ripening in every direction,
to subside once again
at each month's completion.
They sink down as one month ends
to sprout forth when the next begins;
the month furnishes the key
for the opening and closing of their buds.

9. Who has ever beheld
 flowers with pregnant wombs
 which each month brings to pangs of labor,
 then, suddenly, to give birth?
As the month increases,
 so do the flowers mirror its progress;
at full moon they reach maturity,
 blossoming out,
while as the month advances
 toward old age
the flowers too grow old,
 only to be rejuvenated as the next is born.
10. Each month's fruits and flowers
 possess individually
 their own particular treasures,
 but when these are cross fertilized, they multiply:
when two neighboring flowers,
 each with its distinctive color
are crossed
 to become one,
they produce a new color.
 When fruits are thus crossed
they create a new and beautiful offspring
 whose foliage is different.
11. In Paradise the life cycle of the trees
 resembles a necklace:
when the fruits of the first
 are finished and plucked,
then the second ones are ready,
 with a third species following them.
Who has ever beheld
 the autumnal fruits
grasping the heels
 of the first fruits,

just as Jacob grasped hold
of his brother's heel?¹

12. That cornucopia full of fruits
in all stages of development
resembles the course
of human marriage;
it contains the old,
young and middle-aged,
children who have already been born,
and babies still unborn;
its fruits follow one another
and appear
like the continuous succession
of humankind.
13. The river of humanity
consists of people of all ages,
with old, young,
children and babes,
infants in their mothers' arms
and others still unborn, in the womb.
Such is the sequence
of Paradise's fruit:
firstfruits issued forth
with the autumn harvest,
wave upon wave,
fecund with blossoms and fruit.
14. Blessed the sinner
who has received mercy there
and is deemed worthy to be given access
to the environs of Paradise;

¹Gen. 25:26.

even though he remains outside,
 he may pasture there through grace.
As I reflected I was fearful again
 because I had presumed
to suppose that there might be
 between the Garden and the fire
a place where those who have found mercy
 can receive chastisement and forgiveness.

15. Praise to the Just One
 who rules with His grace;
He is the Good One who never draws in
 the limits of His goodness;
even to the wicked
 He stretches forth in His compassion.
His divine cloud hovers over
 all that is His;
it drips dew even on that fire of punishment
 so that, of His mercy,
it enables even the embittered
 to taste of the drops of its refreshment.

HYMN XI

Paradise can only be described in terrestrial terms, but it is essential to realize that these terms are purely metaphorical; to understand them in a literal sense is to abuse God's great condescension in revealing to us, through Scripture, something of Paradise's beauty and wonders. Yet, although Paradise belongs to a different mode of existence, outside time and space, it is still able to serve as a direct source of well-being for life on earth, a fact that the Genesis narrative expresses by means of the imagery of the fountain which issues forth from Paradise and divides itself up into the four great rivers of the world. Nowhere on earth was the fragrant breath of Paradise more

evident than in the Upper Chamber where the Apostles were assembled at Pentecost.

1. The air of Paradise
is a fountain of delight
from which Adam sucked
when he was young;
its very breath, like a mother's breast,
gave him nourishment in his childhood.
He was young, fair,
and full of joy,
but when he spurned the injunction
he grew old, sad and decrepit;
he bore old age
as a burden of woes.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who exalted Adam
and caused him to return to Paradise.

2. No harmful frost,
no scorching heat
is to be found
in that blessed place of delight;
it is a harbor of joys,
a haven of pleasures;
light and rejoicing
have their home there;
gathered there are to be found
harps and lyres,
with shouts of Hosanna,
and the Church crying "Alleluia."
3. The fence which surrounds it
is the peace which gives peace to all;

its inner and outer walls
are the concord which reconciles all things;
the cherub who encircles it
is radiant to those who are within
but full of menace to those outside
who have been cast out.
All that you hear told
about this Paradise,
so pure and holy,
is pure and spiritual.

4. Let not this description of it
be judged by one who hears it,
for descriptions of it
are not at all subject to judgment,
since, even though it may appear terrestrial
because of the terms used,
it is in its reality
spiritual and pure.
Even though the name of "spirit"
is applied to two kinds of beings,
yet the unclean spirit is quite separate
from the one that is sanctified.
5. For him who would tell of it
there is no other means
but to use the names
of things that are visible,
thus depicting for his hearers
a likeness of things that are hidden.
For if the Creator
of the Garden
has clothed His majesty
in terms that we can understand,
how much more can His Garden
be described with our similes?

6. If someone concentrates his attention solely
on the metaphors used of God's majesty,
he abuses and misrepresents that majesty
and thus errs
by means of those metaphors
with which God clothed Himself for his benefit,
and he is ungrateful to that Grace
which stooped low
to the level of his childishness;
although it has nothing in common with him,
yet Grace clothed itself in his likeness
in order to bring him to the likeness of itself.
7. Do not let your intellect
be disturbed by mere names,
for Paradise has simply clothed itself
in terms that are akin to you;
it is not because it is impoverished
that it has put on your imagery;
rather, your nature is far too weak
to be able
to attain to its greatness,
and its beauties are much diminished
by being depicted in the pale colors
with which you are familiar.
8. For feeble eyes
cannot gaze upon
the dazzling sight
of its celestial beauties;
it has clothed its trees
with the names of the trees we know;
its figs are called
by the same name as our figs,
its leaves, which are spiritual,
have taken on bodily form;

they have been changed
so that their vesture may resemble ours.

9. More numerous and glorious
than the stars
in the sky that we behold
are the blossoms of that land,
and the fragrance which exhales from it
through divine Grace
is like a physician
sent to heal the ills
of a land that is under a curse;
by its healing breath it cures
the sickness that entered in
through the serpent.
10. The breath that wafts
from some blessed corner of Paradise
gives sweetness
to the bitterness of this region,
it tempers the curse
on this earth of ours.
That Garden is
the life-breath
of this diseased world
that has been so long in sickness;
that breath proclaims that a saving remedy
has been sent to heal our mortality.
11. What need was there
that from that land
a river should flow forth
and divide itself,¹

¹Gen. 2:10.

except that the blessing of Paradise
should be mingled by means of water
as it issues forth
to irrigate the world,
making clean its fountains
that had become polluted by curses
—just as that “sickly water”
had been made wholesome by the salt.²

12. Thus it is with another spring,*
full of perfumes,
which issues from Eden
and penetrates into the atmosphere
as a beneficial breeze
by which our souls are stirred;
our inhalation is healed
by this healing breath
from Paradise;
springs receive a blessing
from that blessed spring
which issues forth from there.

13. A vast censer
exhaling fragrance
impregnates the air
with its odoriferous smoke,
imparting to all who are near it
a whiff from which to benefit.
How much the more so
with Paradise the glorious:
even its fence assists us,
modifying somewhat
that curse upon the earth
by the scent of its aromas.

²2 Kings 2:21.

14. When the blessed Apostles
were gathered together³
the place shook
and the scent of Paradise,*
having recognized its home,
poured forth its perfumes,
delighting the heralds
by whom
the guests are instructed
and come to His banquet;
eagerly He awaits their arrival
for He is the Lover of mankind.
15. Make me worthy through Your grace
to attain to Paradise's gift
—this treasure of perfumes,
this storehouse of scents.
My hunger takes delight
in the breath of its fragrance,
for its scent gives nourishment to all
at all times,
and whoever inhales it
is overjoyed and forgets his earthly bread;
this is the table of the Kingdom—⁴
blessed is He who prepared it in Eden.

HYMN XII

Truth can be put to deceptive use: the serpent promised Adam and Eve something that would have been true had they remained obedient to God's commandment, but by presuming to transgress the commandment and to snatch at what was

³cf Acts 2:1-4.

⁴Luke 22:30.

promised, all they gained was an awareness and knowledge of what they had lost. Adam's fate thus resembled that of King Uzziah who, by trying to seize the priesthood, lost the kingship as well. Satan tried the same tactics with the second Adam, quoting a psalm which indeed contained truth, but he did so with deceptive intent. This time, however, it is the deceiver who is deceived, and it is his deception that Christ rejects. The demonic Legion, on the other hand, who begs Christ without deception, is granted his request—a precedent which emboldens St Ephrem in making his own request.

Satan's deceptive use of Scripture is then contrasted with Christ's beneficial use of actions which on the surface appear negative or destructive. Indeed, from the very first all that God does is aimed at the enhancement of the glory of humanity, the culmination of His creation: having created Adam and Eve with free will, God wished them to win the crown of immortality through their use of it, and so he hedged the Tree of Knowledge about with the commandment not to eat of its fruit. Failure to use this gift of free will reduces someone to the lower status of the animals—whereas the animals, had they but discernment, would bewail their not having been created human beings!

1. There sprang up within me a query
that troubled my thoughts;
I wished to make enquiry,
but was afraid of being importunate.
But the moment God perceived
what lay in my thoughts
He enveloped with His wisdom
this question of mine,
and thus I felt assured
that in all that He told me
He had accepted my wish
and encompassed it for me within His own words.

RESPONSE: Praise to Your grace that has compassion
on sinners.

2. For He explained to me
about the serpent,
how the truth concerning hidden things
had reached this deceiver.
It was by listening that he learned
and imagined he had knowledge;¹
the voice had cried out
to Adam and warned him
of that Tree of knowledge
of what is good and what evil;
the cunning one heard that voice
and seized on its meaning.

3. He deceived the husbandman
so that he plucked prematurely
the fruit which gives forth its sweetness
only in due season
—a fruit that, out of season,
proves bitter to him who plucks it.
Through a ruse did the serpent
reveal the truth,
knowing well that the result
would be the opposite, because of their
presumption;
for blessing becomes a curse
to him who seizes it in sin.

4. Remember Uziah,
how he entered the sanctuary;
by seeking to seize the priesthood
he lost his kingdom.²
Adam, by wishing to enrich himself,
incurred a double loss.

¹Gen. 3:4-5.

²cf 2 Chron. 26:16-21.

Recognize in the sanctuary
the Tree,
in the censer the fruit,
and in the leprosy the nakedness.
From these two treasures
there proceeded harm in both cases.

5. Abraham doubted and asked
"How shall I know?"³
He uttered what he wanted
but found what he did not want.
God, through a few brief words,
taught him one thing in place of another.
The same happened to Adam
in the Garden:
he lost what he had desired,
and found what he dreaded:
it was disgrace, instead of glory,
that God caused the audacious man to know.
6. There came another Athlete,*
this time not to be beaten;
He put on the same armor
in which Adam had been vanquished.
When the adversary beheld
the armor of conquered Adam,
he rejoiced, not perceiving
that he was being taken by surprise;
He who was within the armor would have terrified
him,
but His exterior gave him courage.
The evil one came to conquer,
but he was conquered and could not hold his
ground.

³Gen. 15:8.

7. Observe how there too
the evil one revealed the truth:
he recited Scripture there,
he exacted truth there;
he clothed himself* with a psalm,⁴
hoping to win by reciting it.
But our Lord would not listen
to him—
not because what he said
was untrue,
but because the evil one
had armed himself with deception.
8. Look too at Legion:⁵
when in anguish he begged,
our Lord permitted and allowed him
to enter into the herd;
respite did he ask for, without deception,
in his anguish,
and our Lord in His kindness
granted this request.
His compassion for demons
is a rebuke to that People,*
showing how much anguish His love suffers
in desiring that men and women should live.
9. Encouraged by the words
I had heard,
I knelt down and wept there,
and spoke before our Lord:
“Legion received his request from You
without any tears;
permit me, with my tears,
to make my request,

⁴Matt. 4:6 (quoting Ps. 90(91): 11).

⁵Mark 5:9.

grant me to enter, instead of that herd,
the Garden,
so that in Paradise I may sing
of its Planter's compassion.

10. Because Adam touched the Tree
he had to run to the fig;
he became like the fig tree,
being clothed in its vesture:
Adam, like some tree,
blossomed with leaves.*
Then he came to that glorious
tree of the Cross,
put on glory from it,
acquired radiance from it,
heard from it the truth
that he would return to Eden once more.⁶

11. Let Job uncover for you
the impudence of Satan:⁷
how he asks and beseeches
the Just One for permission
to test out your minds
in the furnace of temptation.
This is what
the abominable one said:
"No silver without fire
has ever been assayed;
falsehood will be put to shame,
what is true will receive due praise.
12. It is written, furthermore,
Show no favor to the rich,

⁶Luke 23:43.

⁷cf Job 1:9-11.

do not even help out
a poor man in court;⁸
let not judgment be blinded
in the eye of the scales
so that truth may be apparent
in all things;
if it is a case of forgiveness,
let us praise His grace,
if of punishment,
let us acknowledge His justice.”

13. Our Lord rebuked the demon
and shut his mouth;⁹
He was angry with the leper,
He said “woe” to the scribes¹⁰
along with the rich;
the swine He cast into the sea,¹¹
He dried up
the fig tree.*¹²
But all these were occasions
for us to receive benefit,
for by their means He opened up
the great gates of His discerning actions.
14. He did not use threats,
but gave a rebuke in order to save;
even though He said “woe,”
yet His nature is peaceable,
even though He rebuked the demon,
He remains completely serene;

⁸cf Lev. 19:15.

⁹Mark 1:25.

¹⁰Mark 1:43; Matt. 23:13.

¹¹Luke 6:24; Matt. 8:32.

¹²Matt. 21:19.

it was not out of anger
that He bade the swine
be cast into the sea;
nor was it hate which withered up
the fig at His curse,
for He is in all things good.

15. Two Trees did God place
in Paradise,
the Tree of Life
and that of Wisdom,¹³
a pair of blessed fountains,
source of every good;
by means of this
glorious pair
the human person can become
the likeness of God,
endowed with immortal life
and wisdom that does not err.

16. With that manifest knowledge
which God gave to Adam,
whereby he gave names to Eve
and to the animals,¹⁴
God did not reveal the discoveries
of things that were concealed;
but in the case
of that hidden knowledge
from the stars downward,
Adam was able to pursue
enquiry into all
that is within this universe.

¹³Gen. 2:9.

¹⁴Gen. 2:20, 3:20.

17. For God would not grant him the crown
without some effort;
He placed two crowns for Adam,
for which he was to strive,
two Trees to provide crowns
if he were victorious.
If only he had conquered
just for a moment,
he would have eaten the one and lived,
eaten the other and gained knowledge;
his life would have been protected from harm
and his wisdom would have been unshakable.
18. The Just One did not wish
to give Adam the crown quite free,
even though He had allowed him
to enjoy Paradise without toil;
God knew that if Adam wanted
he could win the prize.
The Just One ardently wished
to enhance him,
for, although the rank of supernal beings
is great through grace,
the crown for the proper use of free will
is by no means paltry.
19. In His justice He gave
abundant comfort to the animals;
they do not feel shame for adultery,
nor guilt for stealing;
without being ashamed
they pursue every comfort they encounter,
for they are above
care and shame;
the satisfaction of their desires
is sufficient to please them.

Because they have no resurrection,
neither are they subject to blame.

20. The fool, who is unwilling to realize
his honorable state,
prefers to become just an animal,
rather than a man,
so that, without incurring judgment,
he may serve naught but his lusts.
But had there been sown in animals
just a little
of the sense of discernment,
then long ago would the wild asses have lamented
and wept at their not
having been human.

HYMN XIII

Picking up the theme on which Hymn XII ends, St Ephrem compares the fallen Adam to King Nebuchadnezzar, whose rebellion against God (Daniel 4) led to his becoming like a wild animal. The fact that Nebuchadnezzar returned to his kingdom once he had repented gives hope to us and encourages us too to repent in order that we may return to the kingdom from which Adam/humanity had been expelled. But whereas Nebuchadnezzar abhorred his place of exile, we have become so inured to sin that we actually take pleasure in our exile and have to be rescued from it against our perverted wills; in this we are rebuked by the examples of Samson, Jonah and Joseph, who all rejoiced in their deliverance, whereas we lament when any of us pass from this life to the next.

1. Let me speak what is needful,
teach what may be heard,

seek what may be attained,
spurn all that is inquisitive;
may I ask only what is useful for me,
and speak what befits You,
both what is needful
and what is necessary.
May I take what Grace proffers
and give the thanksgiving that is appropriate;
through Your grace may my offering
enter before Your good pleasure.

RESPONSE: Through Your grace make me worthy
of that Garden of happiness.

2. In the beginning God created the creation,
the fountainhead of delights;
the house which He constructed
provisions those who live therein,
for upon His gift
innumerable created beings depend;
from a single table
does He provide
every day for each creature
all things in due measure.
Grant that we may acknowledge
Your grace, O Good One.
3. A garden full of glory,
a chaste bridal chamber,
did he give to that king*
fashioned from the dust,
sanctifying and separating him
from the abode of wild animals;
for glorious was Adam
in all things—

in where he lived and what he ate,
in his radiance and dominion.
Blessed is He who elevated him above all
so that he might give thanks to the Lord of all.

4. The king of Babylon resembled¹
Adam king of the universe:
both rose up against the one Lord
and were brought low;
He made them outlaws,
casting them afar.
Who can fail to weep,
seeing that these free-born kings
preferred slavery
and servitude.
Blessed is He who released us
so that His image might no longer be in bondage.

5. David wept for Adam,²
at how he fell
from that royal abode
to the abode of wild animals.
Because he went astray through a beast
he became like the beasts:
He ate, together with them
as a result of the curse,
grass and roots,
and he died, becoming their peer.
Blessed is He who set him apart
from the wild animals* again.

6. In that king*
did God depict Adam:

¹cf Dan. 4.

²cf Ps. 48(49):13.

since he provoked God by his exercise of kingship,
God stripped him of that kingship.
The Just One was angry and cast him out
into the region of wild beasts;
he dwelt there with them
in the wilderness³
and only when he repented did he return
to his former abode and kingship.
Blessed is He who has thus taught us to repent
so that we too may return to Paradise.

7. Because it was not easy
for us to see our fallen state—
how and whence we had fallen
at the very outset—
He depicted it all together
in that king,
portraying in our fall
his fall,
and portraying our return
in his repentant return.
Praise to Him who delineated
this likeness for the repentant.
8. Although he disliked
the abode of wild beasts
it was necessary
for the king to remain there;
yet, despite his madness and error,
he recalled that he was a man
and prayed that he might be returned
to his own former abode;
and when the Good One returned him,
he gave thanks to Him for His compassion.

³Dan. 4:32-3.

Blessed is He who gave us in him
an example of returning.

9. Look at how great is our shame
in comparison:
our very confinement in darkness
has become for us a source of pleasure;
we are proud
of the land of curses;⁴
how we love
our confinement in a pit!
Like the Egyptians
we are drowned in the sea.⁵
Blessed is He who has had pity on us
so that we should not be left in this our state.

10. The Good One in His love
wished to discipline us for doing wrong,
and so we had to leave Paradise
with its bridal chamber of glory;
He made us live with the wild beasts,
which caused us sorrow,
so that we might see how little
our honor had become,
and so would supplicate Him and beg to return
to our inheritance.
Praise be to Him who released
these prisoners who have no wish to be free!⁶
11. In both his mind and understanding
was the king of Babylon childlike,
but through our Lord, my brethren,
your understanding is complete.

⁴Gen. 3:17.

⁵Exod. 14:28.

⁶cf Isaiah 61:1.

He returned to Babylon:⁷
both he and the city have vanished;
but do you, my brothers,
seek your city,*
for both you and it
shall endure forever.
Happy are those who live there,
for in it none ever need to be buried.

12. Satan the tyrant outwitted Samson
with a woman,⁸
the same tyrant outwitted Adam
with a woman:
Samson had to grind at the mill,⁹
Adam had to labor wearily on the soil;
Samson prayed
to be released,
whereas we pray
to grow old in our misery.
Blessed is He who delivered Samson,
releasing him from the grinding.
13. Samson is a type of the death
of Christ the High Priest:
Samson's death returns prisoners
to their towns,¹⁰
whereas the High Priest's death
has returned us to our heritage.
Let us repeat to each other
the good news in joy,
that the gate is once again open,
and happy is he who enters in quickly.

⁷Dan. 4:36.

⁸Judges 16.

⁹Judges 16:21.

¹⁰cf Judges 16:23-31.

Blessed is He who has not made us
outlaws never to return.

14. Jonah knew into what
the Just One had cast him;
he prayed, and was brought back to land.¹¹
In him we shall be judged, my brothers,
for we do not even realize
whither we have been driven out.
Jonah came up from the whale and gave thanks:
he was not ungrateful;
but we think it a cause for complaint
when we are released from our yoke.
Yet You, Lord, put up with us,
who complain as we are rescued.

15. Joseph took no delight,
despite all the honor that was paid him,
in remaining in prison;¹²
his example rebukes us, my brothers,
for the more we are in bondage,
the more we are pleased.
He was released, and reached his true stature,
in order to teach us
how, in the Kingdom, our departed ones too
achieve their full stature:
being separated from us for a little,
they have come to their Lord,

16. This day of separation,
which to us seems to cut off all hope,
only increases their hope,
now that they are returning to their own city:

¹¹Jonah 2.

¹²Gen. 41:14.

lamentation for those below,
but joy for those above;
the world below sorrows at the loss
of their familiar voices,
but the heaven above is overjoyed
that their song is now intermingled with the
song of the seraphs.
Blessed is the man who weeps over himself,
rather than for the departed.

HYMN XIV

St Ephrem continues both the alphabetic acrostic and the theme of the previous hymn: in our failure to recognize our captive state on earth we resemble the Hebrew slave who preferred continued slavery to the freedom to which he was entitled after seven years' service. Our misguided love for our present condition is rebuked by the examples of numerous Old Testament saints: all of them urge us to seek our true city in Eden. Particularly illogical are our laments over the deaths of children who now pasture in Paradise; humanity is in fact like a tree from which fruit is daily plucked as an offering. And what is most remarkable of all is that the unripe fruit—those who die young—is even sweeter than the ripe!

1. All of us each day in many diverse ways
are under constraint
to learn by experience
not to be held captive here upon earth,
yet despite this experience
our minds remain down below.
Blessed is that person who has realized
how worthwhile it is
to lay in provisions
for receiving our Lord;

blessed indeed is he at whose merchandise
his Lord is pleased.

RESPONSE: Grant us to welcome Your kingdom
with cries of "Hosanna."

2. How much we resemble
the slave who rejected
the liberty offered him
by the seventh year:
he allowed his ear to be pierced,
becoming a slave in perpetuity.¹
It is liberty that they receive
at their death,
those weary ones whom you have buried,
the chaste whose coffin you have followed.
3. Jeremiah was thrown into a pit²
that proved beneficial;
yet, though his reward was great,
he had no desire to tarry there.
But we, whose life here on earth
is blended with all kinds of ills,
still pray that we may be
allowed to remain here,
for we do not perceive
how we are being strangled.
O Lord, grant that we may recognize
the place where we are held prisoner.
4. We should learn from Daniel,³
who prayed

¹Exod. 21:2, 5.

²cf Jer. 37:15-16; 38:6.

³cf Dan. 9:15-19.

that he might come up from Babylon
to the land of promise;
Babylon is the likeness of this earth,
full of curses.
God gave us this type which He depicted
so that we too
might pray that we return
to our dwelling in Eden.
Blessed is He who brings us forth
through grace to our goal.

5. Noah too, in a mystery,
expectantly prayed
to be released
from the ark and to go forth,⁴
even though there was nothing within it
to cause him any harm.
How much more should we
turn our backs
on this abode,
this harbor of misfortunes.
Blessed is that person who has steered
his boat straight into Paradise.
6. Moses in Egypt
was held in great honor:
Pharaoh's daughter called him her own son⁵
—yet rejecting this,
he chose to be just a shepherd,⁶
living in hardship.
How much more should we
rejoice at our departure

⁴cf Gen. 8:6-12.

⁵Exod. 2:10, Heb. 11:24.

⁶Exod. 3:1.

when we are released from this place of servitude
and discover our liberty.
Blessed is that person
who finds freedom in Paradise.

7. Jacob led out his sheep
and brought them to his father's home;⁷
a symbol for those with discernment,
a parable for those with perception
is to be found in this homecoming:
let us too return to our Father's house,⁸
my brethren, and not become
captivated with desire
for this transient earth
—for your true city is in Eden.⁹
Blessed indeed is that person
who has seen his dear ones in its midst.

8. There all fruit is holy,
all raiment luminous,
every crown glorious,
every rank the most exalted—
happiness without toil,
delight that knows no fear,
a marriage feast which continues
for ever and ever.
By contrast, to my eyes this abode
seems one of torment:
blessed the person who says
“Lord, release me from here.”

9. To the voices of the celestial beings,
to the melody of the spiritual,

⁷Gen. 31:17.

⁸cf Luke 15:20.

⁹cf Philipp. 3:20, Hebr. 11:16.

to the seraphs with their chants,
to the cherubs with their wings:
to all their lovely music
there is no comparison here below.
Their delight is in
the praise which they render,
each one receiving
rich sustenance through his lyre.
Make us worthy to take delight, along with them,
in cries of "Hosanna."

10. If we momentarily throw aside
the veil from our eyes
and glance at that place,
we will rue our delay
which we have prolonged in this world,
the harbor of debts,*
where merchants each day
suffer great loss,
where ships are wrecked
and cargoes are seized.
Blessed are the children
who have passed through it without toil.

11. In Paradise these sheep
may pasture without fear,
while Satan laments
that he has left no mark on them;
lust too is downcast,
not having stained them,
but virginity rejoices
as she reigns
in these chaste temples
that were in no wise sullied.
Happy the person held worthy to reach
their place of meeting.

12. Their beauty never fades,
 their radiance never dims;
their parents will regret
 their misguided recriminations
and give thanks, once they are there,
 to Him whom they decried here below.
Yes, they will thank
 the Gracious One who endures
our wailing lamentation
 and all our rent garments.
Blessed is He who, despite our provocation,
 has brought to true stature those whom we love.
13. Praise to the Husbandman*
 who tends the tree of humanity,
who plucks off each day
 fruit to serve as an offering
—fruits of all sizes,
 kinds and varieties;
and what is so wonderful,
 the unripe fruits
are even sweeter
 than those that have ripened.
Blessed is He who has offered up to His Father
 a crown of young children.
14. There remorse overtakes
 the many people
who were tested and did not persevere,
 who were chastened and did not sustain it;
the Good One chose
 only small and transient punishments
to wipe out their bill of debt,¹⁰
 but they would have none of it:

¹⁰Col. 2:14.

because they found fault with Grace,
now in justice they feel remorse.
Praise to You from all,
for You are entirely good to all.

15. May Your grace bring me too back,
who am held in captivity;
my forefathers were taken away captive
from the Garden of Eden
to this land of thorns
through Satan's ill counsel;
it was he who has beguiled me
into dearly loving
this land of curses,
this place of chastisement.
Blessed is He who has brought us back from captivity
and slain him who took us away captive.

HYMN XV

Paradise can be compared to the wind: although it cannot be seen, it is nonetheless experienced. The Tree of Knowledge—awareness of truth and of spiritual reality—is the gate to Paradise, through which the mind can enter. But the Tree of Knowledge has to be approached in the right spirit and in obedience to God; otherwise, it will lead to destruction and loss, as both Adam and Uzziah discovered. Furthermore, once led astray by eating the fruit of the Tree in disobedience, man goes on to blame the fruit, rather than his greed for the consequences of his grasping. So strong indeed was the serpent's poison that it enabled Satan to turn aside (the verb is *sta* in Syriac, providing a word play) the whole of humanity—when we should be listening instead to another representative of the animal world, the ass whose brief words to Balaam saved its master from destruction.

1. My brethren, consider the wind:
 though its blast is tumultuous,
it lacks any color by which it can be seen,
 for it is hidden in its manifestation;
having no outer array
 or substance at all,
it is both hidden and yet manifest
 when it is blowing.
So too the abode of Paradise
 is both hidden and manifest:
while it can be perceived to exist,
 what it really is cannot be perceived.

RESPONSE: Blessed is He who came and invited
 both worlds to His Paradise.

2. The tree that is called
 the Tree of Knowledge
symbolizes the gate
 of Paradise:
it is through the gate of knowledge
 that one is able to enter in;
it is the likeness
 of its glorious Creator,
in whose hidden abode
 through the gate of knowledge
all who are perceptive
 may approach His hiddenness.
3. Consider this knowledge
 which is the gateway to all things:
by it the intellect
 can enter everywhere,
though where it meets error
 in front of it

it comes up against a wall
and is blocked.
Through this gate of knowledge
the intellect enters in,
explores every kind of treasure,
brings out every kind of riches.

4. Even when the army
surrounded Elisha
a voice proved the key
to the eyes of the shepherd.¹
When the disciple's eyes
were held closed,
bread too was the key
whereby their eyes were opened
to recognize the Omniscient:²
saddened eyes beheld
a vision of joy
and were instantly filled with happiness.
5. So likewise that Wood,
which is the Tree of Knowledge,
can, with its fruit, roll back
the cloud of ignorance,
so that eyes can recognize
the beauty
of that Tabernacle
hidden within;
but because Adam and Eve
ate it in sin,
the vision that should have caused joy of heart
resulted in grief of heart.

¹2 Kings 6:17.

²Luke 24:31.

6. Intelligence is
like a treasurer
who carries on his shoulder³
the keys to learning,*
fitting a key
to each locked door,
opening with ease
even the most difficult—
skilled in what is manifest,
well instructed in what is hidden,
training souls
and enriching creation.
7. The precious stones of the ephod
worn by the priest in accord with the
commandment
he called
“luminous” and “perfect,”*
as well as
“knowledge” and “truth.”⁴
Thus the priest was robed in knowledge
whereby he might hear
the voice that came to him
from inside the sanctuary,
for it spoke to him
from between the cherubim.
8. Accompanied by the knowledge
which was hidden in the ephod
the priest entered the sanctuary,
a type for Paradise,
and he tasted of the Tree
through the symbol of the revelation given him.

³cf Isaiah 22:22.

⁴Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8.

But if anyone entered
contrary to the commandment, they died,
as a type of Adam who died
for taking the fruit prematurely.
The priest put on sanctification,
but Adam was stripped of glory.*

9. The intellect cannot explore
the bosom of those trees
without that fruit,
nor can the priest investigate
that treasury of revelations
without the ephod.
Two people did the evil one beguile and captivate
with his blandishments—
promising to make Adam into a god
and Uzziah into a priest,⁵
whereas in reality he stripped the one of his glory
and clothed the other in leprosy.

10. The Exalted One gave to Adam
the luxury of Paradise
and to Uzziah
the luxury of kingship.
To the former he forbade the fruit,
to the latter the censer.
Both however grasped at
something they were not given:
with the censer
Uzziah's name turned putrid,
with the scented fruit
Adam's name became loathsome.

11. It is easy to understand
how mankind

⁵2 Chron. 26:16-21.

has come to hate creation:
 having become hateful themselves, they hold
 creation to be hateful;
by sacrificing flesh they spoil it,
 by defiling marriage they have set it aside,
while gold they make hateful
 by means of their idols.
Since it was through the fair fruit
 that Adam became odious
he has made that fruit an object of hate,
 considering it to be harmful.

12. It is obvious that the censer
 of the inner sanctuary is good,
but the Tree in Paradise
 has come to be considered as poisonous.
If the censer is glorious,
 then the fruit is even more so;
through the censer, pure and glorious,
 the evil one
made royalty leprous,
 and likewise in Paradise
the cunning one slew
 the young couple with the excellent fruit.

13. Of the serpent
 which spoke for a moment
God provided an illustration
 in the speech of the ass⁶
which spoke for a moment
 to rebuke the audacious Balaam.
So too the serpent spoke
 in order to test

⁶Num. 22:28.

the ears of Adam and Eve:
their ears heard two voices,
and at the voice of the bitter one
they held the Sweet One's to be false.

14. The serpent served as a garment
for the evil one to put on:
on seeing the innocent ones
he became full of guile,
he prepared a cunning trap
for the hearing of the young couple.
In their simplicity
they listened to his words eagerly,
for he made a show of his care,
but hid well his guile.
On another occasion the Iscariot
can instruct you in the devil's types.
15. How strong is his poison,
upsetting the whole world.
Who can hold back the sea
of that bitter one?
Everyone contains drops of it
that can harm you.
Judas was the treasurer⁷
of his poison,
and although Satan's form is hidden,
in Judas he is totally visible;
though Satan's history is a long one,
it is summed up in the Iscariot.
16. Let the ass put the serpent to shame
with its brief words:
it spoke the truth,
while from the serpent issued falsehood;

⁷John 12:6.

it turned aside to turn away greedy Balaam
who had gone awry.⁸
The serpent too turned aside,*
and caused us to go aside to our destruction;
it made crooked our thoughts,
and so God made crooked its path;
the course it travels
indicates how it turned awry our road.

17. All this, and similar things
that I have read in the Scriptures,
have helped depict in my mind
that Garden of Life;
blessed is the person who is worthy to attain
its enjoyment.
May the Merciful One
bring me to its fruits,
may their taste give me life,
or their scent strike me,
or their radiance reach me,
or their dew bathe me!

⁸Num. 22:23.

Notes to the Hymns on Paradise

(Marked with asterisks in the text)

- I.1 *master*: or "teacher" (*rabbā*), perhaps reflecting Jewish usage, *Mōshē rabbēnū*, "Moses our teacher."
Law: Ephrem uses the archaic term *urāytā*, of Jewish Aramaic origin, rather than the more usual *nāmōsā*, from Greek *nomos*. The term *urāytā* deliberately associates the Hebrew word Torah, Law, with the root 'wr, "light."
- I.6 *bridal chambers*: for the importance of this theme see the Introduction.
- I.10 *valley*: for the topography of Paradise and its surroundings see the Introduction.
Qardu: Ephrem follows the Syriac Bible which, together with Josephus and the Targumim, identifies the mountain where the Ark came to rest as Mt Qardu in North Iraq, rather than Mt Ararat in Armenia.
- I.11 *sons of God*: Gen. 6:2. Several interpretations of this term were current in antiquity; the Septuagint paraphrased the Hebrew with "angels," and the Book of Enoch links the passage with the idea of fallen angels who intermarried with mankind. Ephrem, however, follows a quite different tradition, first attested by Julius Africanus (c. 160-c. 240), according to which the "sons of God" were the Sethites, who dwelt on higher ground, while the "daughters of men" were the Cainites, who lived lower down. This interpretation, known to several of the Greek Fathers (see L. R. Wickham in *Oudtestamentische Studien* 19 (1974), pp. 135-47) became the standard one in the Syriac Church (a detailed exposition of the tradition is to be found in section III of Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*).

- I.13 *a mother . . .*: perhaps Ephrem has in mind a particular instance.
- I.16 *but if*: Ephrem deliberately leaves the sentence without a main clause.
- I.16 *crumbs*: an allusion to Matt. 15:27, in the narrative of Christ and the Canaanite woman. Compare VII.26 and IX.29.
- I.17 *begs for succor*: both Ephrem and Aphrahat used a Biblical text (probably the Diatessaron) where *parakaleitai* in Luke 16:25 was translated, not by "[Lazarus] is comforted," but "is supplicated"—that is, by the Rich Man. Compare also Ephrem's *Letter to Publius*, section 4 (edition and translation in *Le Muséon* 89 (1976)).
- II Response: The lance which pierced the side of Christ is regularly contrasted typologically with the sword of the cherub guarding Paradise (see the Introduction). The refrain to VI expresses the same idea more obliquely ("Blessed is He who through His Cross has flung open Paradise for us").
- II.2 *key*: Ephrem employs this imagery again at III.5, VI.1, VII.1, VIII.2 and XV.4 and 6.
- II.3 . . . *your inheritance, darkness*: not a direct Biblical quotation, but compare Matt. 8:12ff; Luke 12:16-20.
- II.4 *their luxurious living (nyāhā)*: there is probably a double entendre here, for *nyāhā* can refer either to their former "luxurious living," or to the "rest," or "peace of mind," that they might have enjoyed in Paradise.
- II.7 *boundary . . . garments*: for these themes see the Introduction.
- II.8 *issue forth toward us*: Ephrem refers to the four rivers of Gen. 2:10, whose geographical relationship to the Paradise mountain is explained in his Commentary on Genesis II.6 (see the translation below).
- II.11 *God's Presence*: Ephrem uses the Syriac form of the Jewish term *Shekhina* here.
- III.6 *Their eyes were opened*: compare Commentary on Genesis II.21-2.
- III.8 *that hero of old*: an allusion to Tantalus. A further allusion to classical mythology can be found in the Nisibene Hymns XXXVI.5 (Orpheus).

- III.12 *Had Adam conquered*: compare Commentary on Genesis II.23.
- III.14 *Uzziah*: Ephrem frequently refers to this king who tried to usurp the role of priest as well (II Chron. 26); in the Paradise Hymns see XII.4 and XV.9-10.
both kings: Ephrem and the Syriac Fathers follow Rabbinic tradition which regarded Adam as both king and priest; compare XIII.3-4.
- III.15 *deprived of its feet*: the serpent was punished by the loss of its feet (deduced from Gen. 3:14) according to a Jewish tradition also known to Aphrahat (Demonstration IX.8 and XIV 12); see for example Josephus, *Antiquities* I, 50 (further references can be found in Kronholm, p. 113, note 72).
- IV.5 *another robe*: the thought is densely packed here: the robe is the "robe of glory" which Christ has once again made available for humanity (Adam), and the penitent thief is taken here as the first representative of the human race to re-enter Paradise in this robe; see also Introduction. For Eve-Mary typology in the early Syriac Fathers see R. Murray, "Mary the Second Eve in the early Syriac Fathers," *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1971), pp. 372-84, and S. P. Brock, "Mary in Syriac Tradition," in A. Stacpoole (ed.), *Mary's Place in Christian Dialogue* (Slough, 1982), pp. 182-91.
- IV.10 *little coin*: perhaps an allusion to Mark 12:42, but Ephrem is also depicting himself as a beggar.
- V.1 *created things*: the manuscripts offer two different readings here; in the *Harp of the Spirit* (no. 2) the other reading was adopted.
- V.2 *witness to the Creator*: for Scripture and Nature as God's two witnesses (John 8:17) compare Hymns against the Heresies XXVIII.11:

Look and see how Nature and Scripture
 are yoked together for the Husbandman:

Nature abhors adulterers,
 practicers of magic and murderers;
 Scripture abhors them too.

Once Nature and Scripture had cleaned the land
 they sowed in it new commandments

—in the land of the heart, so that it might bear fruit,
praise for the Lord of Nature
glory for the Lord of Scripture.

- V.10 *heart*: according to Semitic anthropology, the heart was the seat of the intellectual faculties as well as of the emotions.
- V.11 *empty*: since the final Resurrection, when the body and soul would be reunited (and so enabled to enter Paradise: see Hymn VIII), had not yet taken place.
- V.14 *splendors*: literally "luxuries," a term which Ephrem will have derived (indirectly) from the Septuagint translation of "Eden" as *truphē*.
- V.15 *diligent*: a word often used by Syriac writers in connection with the parable of the talents (Luke 19:11-27). Compare also Hymn VI.11.
- VI Response *flung open*: literally "breached," a verb sometimes used by Ephrem for the action of the lance in John 19:34.
- VI.5 *rode*: literally "the vehicle (of the Son of its Lord)." Ephrem uses this striking imagery on a number of occasions, e.g. Hymns on Unleavened Bread XIII.8, Hymns on Faith XVII.8.
- VI.6 *plants*: the term often refers to medicinal herbs.
- VI.8 *fruit*: the line implies that Communion was received daily.
- VI.9 *whitened*: i.e. at baptisms.
- VI.12 *chaste (qaddishē)*: for this technical term, referring to the married who abstain from sexual intercourse, see the Introduction.
- VI.19 *Sheol*: the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint "Hades").
- VI.21 *from every quarter*: this may reflect Jewish speculation of the Hellenistic period: in the Sibylline Books (III.24-6) Adam's very name was held to signify that he was created out of earth from the East (*anatolē*), West (*duis*), North (*arktos*) and South (*mesēmbria*).
- VI.23 *Watchers*: i.e. angels; the term is taken from the Book of Daniel.
- VII.3 *life of mourning*: the "mourners" (*abīlē*, based on

- Matt. 5:4) refer to those who had adopted a penitential way of life.
- VII.7 *stripped off*: a deliberate irony, in view of Gen. 39:12.
- VII.9 *first fruits*: compare XIV.13.
- VII.11 *No blemish*: i.e. in Paradise.
- VII.18 It has been claimed that this verse inspired the description of the *houris* of Paradise in the Koran; Beck, however, has shown that this hypothesis rests on a misunderstanding of the Syriac text (see Bibliographical Note).
- VII.19 *seven sons of light*: the reference is to the seven Maccabean martyrs, put to death at the order of King Antiochus before the very eyes of their mother (in 2 Macc. 7 she is unnamed, but later Jewish tradition knows her as Hannah, Syriac as Shmoni, and Greek as Solomone).
- VII.21 *useless*: perhaps a reminiscence of Odes of Solomon 11:23, "For there is much space in Your Paradise, and there is nothing in it that is useless."
- VII.24 *name*: of Christian.
- IX.1 *paschal joy*: there is a play on words, for *mapsah* can mean either "give joy" or "celebrate passover."
- IX.15 *Chaldeans*: famed in antiquity for their knowledge of astronomy and astrology.
- X.3 *Eden's delights*: there is a word play in the Syriac.
- XI.4 *heavenly*: the text can be vocalized either as *shmayānā* "heavenly," or as *shamīnā* "fecund."
- X.5 *chaste*: see note to VI.12.
- X.8 *buds*: the Syriac can also mean "wombs" (compare X.9).
- XI.12 *another spring*: probably baptism is meant.
- XI.14 *scent of Paradise*: several early Syriac writers refer to the fragrance experienced by the apostles at Pentecost, and it has been suggested that the lost Old Syriac version of Acts also contained such a reference.
- XII.6 *Athlete*: this title is already applied to Christ in the Syriac Acts of Thomas (third century); cf R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 198.
- XII.7 *clothed himself*: this metaphor is also frequently used

of the Incarnation. In the Nisibene hymns (XXXV.4) Ephrem has Satan say:

I lured Him [Christ] after His fast with excellent
bread
—but He would have none of it;
I struggled painfully to learn a psalm
in order to catch Him by means of His own psalms:
I took great care to learn my set piece,
but He made this set piece of mine utterly ineffective.

XII.8 *People*: the Jewish People as opposed to the Gentile Peoples.

XII.10 *blossomed with leaves*: the same quaint image occurs in an early Byzantine acrostic hymn on Adam, stanza 8 (P. Maas, *Frühbyzantinische Kirchenpoesie* (Berlin, 1931), p. 14): "like a tree he wore fig leaves."

XII.13 *the fig tree*: in his Commentary on the Diatessaron Ephrem explains the incident of Matt. 21:20-1 as follows:

When Adam sinned and was stripped of the glory in which he was clothed, he covered his nakedness with fig leaves. Our Savior came and underwent suffering in order to heal Adam's wounds and to provide a garment of glory for his nakedness. He dried up the fig tree in order to show that there would no longer be any need of fig leaves to serve as Adam's garment, since Adam had returned to his former glory, and so no longer had any need of leaves or "garments of skin."

XII.17-18 Compare the Commentary on Genesis II.17 (translated below).

XIII.3 *king*: i.e. Adam; see on II.14.

XIII.5 *from the wild animals*: a variant reading here has "from them at the Resurrection."

XIII.6 *that king*: i.e. Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4).

XIII.11 *city*: perhaps Ephrem alludes to Hebrews 11:16; compare hymn XIV.7.

XIV.10 *debts*: the context suggests that this is the correct reading (the other manuscript reads "harbor of joys").

XIV.13 *Husbandman*: a favorite divine title in Ephrem's writ-

ings: see R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 195-7.

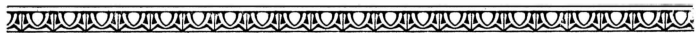
XV.6 *learning*: or, perhaps, "doctrine"; cf VI.1.

XV.7 "*luminous*" and "*perfect*": these are the Urim and Thummim on the high priest's breast-piece; Ephrem follows the Peshitta's rendering of these two Hebrew terms (Exod. 28:30 "*luminous and perfect*"; Lev. 8:8 "*knowledge and truth*"; the Septuagint has "*manifestation and truth*" in both passages).

XV.8 A detailed discussion of this stanza is given by E. Beck in *Oriens Christianus* 62 (1978), pp. 24-35.

XV.16 *turned aside*: the Syriac text has an elaborate word play, for "Satan" was often derived by popular etymology from *stā* "turned aside."

(The reader who would like a much more extensive commentary on the Paradise Hymns is referred to E. Beck, *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies* (*Studia Anselmiana* 26, 1951) and T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (*Coniectanea Biblica, Old Testament Series* 11; Lund, 1978), pp. 45-134).



3.

THE COMMENTARY ON GENESIS (Section II)

ST EPHREM, COMMENTARY ON GENESIS,
Section II (Genesis 2-3)

Many of the themes in the Paradise Hymns find their best illustration in St Ephrem's own prose commentary on Genesis, whose second section covers chapters 2-3 of that Biblical book. Even though the beginning and end of this section of the commentary cover topics not alluded to in the Paradise Hymns, it has seemed preferable to offer a complete translation of it, rather than a series of excerpts.

1. After speaking about the Sabbath rest, and how God had blessed and sanctified this day, Scripture* returns to the narrative of the initial establishment of creation, this time passing over, with only a few words, things it had already spoken of* and recounting at greater length matters it had previously omitted. Thus it begins to describe the history of creation for a second time: "These are the generations of heaven and earth when they were created on the day that God made heaven and earth. None of the trees of the field was yet in existence, and the vegetation

had not yet sprouted, seeing that He had not yet caused rain to fall on the earth, and Adam was not there to work on the earth. A fountain went up and irrigated the surface of the earth.”¹

2. You should realize, reader, that even though the days of creation were completed and Scripture had pronounced a blessing on the Sabbath day that had been sanctified and had brought it to a close,¹ it now reverts to narrating the very beginning of the acts of creation, even though the days of these acts had come to an end.

“These are the generations of heaven and of earth,”² that is to say, this is the narrative of the establishment of heaven and earth “on the day that the Lord made heaven and earth, for none of the trees of the field had yet come into being, and the vegetation had not sprouted.”³ It is quite true that these had not been created, seeing that these were made on the third day.⁴

Now it was not without reason that Scripture introduced on the first day mention of things created on the third.

3. For it says, “The trees were not in existence and the vegetation had not yet sprouted, seeing that the Lord had not caused rain to fall on the earth. A fountain went up from the earth to irrigate the surface of the earth.”¹ Since everything was and is born through the interaction of water and earth, Scripture took care to indicate that trees and vegetation were not created at the same time as the earth, seeing that rain had not yet fallen. But after the great fountain of the great primordial deep had gone up and

1 note 1: Gen. 2:4-6.

2 note 1: Gen. 2:3.

note 2: Gen. 2:4.

note 3: Gen. 2:5.

note 4: cf Gen. 1:9-13.

3 note 1: Gen. 2:5-6.

irrigated the entire surface of the earth, then, once the waters had been gathered together on the third day, the earth gave birth to all sorts of vegetation on the very same day.

The waters over which the darkness had been spread on the first day are the same as those which issued from this fountain, covering, in a twinkling of an eye, the entire earth. This is the fountain which was opened up in the days of Noah, covering over all mountains on the earth. Now this fountain did not come up from under the earth, but from the earth, for it explicitly says "the fountain was coming up"—not *from beneath* the earth, but "*from* the earth." That these waters in the earth do not precede the earth in time is testified by the fact that the earth carries them in its womb.

So "the fountain went up from the earth," as Scripture says, "and it irrigated the surface of the entire earth." The earth then produced trees, vegetation and plants. It was not the case that God was unable to generate everything from the earth in any other way, but, because it was His will that the earth should give birth through the agency of water, He provided an initial beginning for this process, corresponding to the way in which it would be carried on until the end.

4. Having spoken about what had been omitted and left untold on the first day, Scripture reverts to the description of Adam's fashioning as follows: "And Adam was not there to work on the earth."¹ Indeed he was not in existence during all the days prior to the sixth, because it was on the sixth day that he was created.²

So on the sixth day "the Lord fashioned dust from the ground into Adam, and He breathed the breath of life into

4 note 1: Gen. 2:5.

note 2: Gen. 1:26-7, 31.

his nostrils, and Adam became a living being."³ Although animals, cattle and birds came into being at the same moment that they received life, in Adam's case God honored him in a variety of ways: first, because it is said that God "fashioned him with His hands and He breathed a soul into him"; He also gave him authority over Paradise and what is outside Paradise; and He wrapped him in glory* and gave him reason, thought and an awareness of the Majesty.

5. Having spoken of the honored way in which Adam was fashioned, Scripture turns to describe Paradise and Adam's introduction into it: "And the Lord planted Paradise in Eden of old, and He placed there Adam whom He had fashioned."¹

Now Eden is the land of Paradise. By "of old"* Scripture means that He planted it on the third day; it explains this with the words "the Lord caused to sprout from the earth every kind of tree that is beautiful to look upon and good to eat";² and to show that this refers to Paradise, it says, "and the Tree of Life was in the midst of Paradise, and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil."³

6. After having spoken of Paradise and the day on which it was planted, as well as the introduction into it of Adam, and the Tree of Life and its companion, Scripture turns to describe the river which goes out from its midst, and how it is divided up outside Paradise into four sources: "A river was issuing from Eden to irrigate Paradise."¹ Notice that here too it calls the delightfull and of Paradise "Eden."

Had that river not first irrigated Paradise it would not

4 note 3: Gen. 2:7.

5 note 1: Gen. 2:8.

note 2: Gen. 2:9.

note 3: Gen. 2:9.

6 note 1: Gen. 2:10.

have divided up into four sources outside it. I think it was perhaps for purposes of convenience that it was said to "irrigate," seeing that the spiritual trees of Paradise do not require any irrigation by water. But if, despite their being spiritual, they nevertheless absorbed something of those blessed and spiritual waters there, I should not object to such an opinion.

The taste of the water of the four tributaries which flow from that river is not like the taste of the head of the source. For if water varies in taste in our countries, all of which are subject to the sentence of the curse, how much more would one expect the taste in the blessed land of Eden to be different from that of the land which was laid under the curse of the Just One as a result of Adam's transgression?

Now these four rivers are as follows: the Pishon, that is, the Danube;* the Gihon, that is, the Nile; the Tigris and the Euphrates. In between these we live. Even though the regions from which these flow are known, this does not apply to the head of the source; for Paradise is situated on a great height, and the rivers are swallowed up under the surrounding sea, descending as it were down a tall water pipe;* having passed through the ground beneath the sea and reached this earth, the earth then spouts forth with one of them in the West—the Danube, or Pishon—the Gihon in the South, and the Euphrates and Tigris in the North.

7. Having spoken of Paradise and the rivers which issue from it and divide up, Scripture turns to speak of the entry of Adam into Paradise and the law which was laid down for him, as follows: "The Lord God took Adam and left him in the Paradise of Eden to till it [*or* worship Him] and keep [*or* guard] it."¹*

7 note 1: Gen. 2:15.

With what did he till it, seeing that he had not agricultural implements? And how would he have been able to till it, seeing that he could not have managed it himself? And what would he have to clear from it, seeing that there were no thistles or thorns there? Again, how could he have guarded it, since he could not walk right around it? And from what was he guarding it, seeing that there was no thief trying to enter it? Now the barrier* which came into existence at the transgression of the commandment testified to the fact that no guard was required as long as the commandment was kept.

So Adam had nothing to keep there except for the law which was laid down for him. Nor was any work entrusted to him apart from preserving the commandment that he had been given. But should someone say that he had these two things to do as well as the commandment, I would not oppose him.

8. Having spoken of the introduction of Adam into Paradise and the reason God brought him there, Scripture turns to describe the commandment which was laid down for him, as follows: "And the Lord God commanded Adam, saying: 'You may indeed eat of all the trees in Paradise, but of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat; for on the day you eat of it you will certainly die.'"¹

This commandment was a light one, for God had given him the whole of Paradise and held back from him but a single tree. If one tree sufficed for someone's sustenance, and many trees were withheld from him, there would still be relief for his distress, seeing that there still existed food for his hunger. But where it is a case of God's giving him many trees when one would have been sufficient, this means that if transgression takes place, it is not as a result of any

8 note 1: Gen. 2:16-17.

real need, but because of contempt. So God withheld from him a single tree,* hedging it around with death, so that even if Adam were to fail to keep the law out of love for the Lawgiver, at least the fear of death that surrounded the tree would make him afraid of overstepping the law.

9. Having spoken of Adam's entry into Paradise and of the law that was laid down for him, Scripture turns to describe the names which he gave to the animals, as follows: "The Lord fashioned out of the earth all the wild animals and the birds of the sky; and He brought them to Adam to see what he would call them."¹

They were not actually "fashioned," for the earth produced the animals, and the water the birds.² By saying "fashioned" Scripture wishes to indicate that all animals, reptiles, cattle and birds came into being as a result of the combining of earth and water.

It says "He brought them to Adam" in order to indicate his wisdom, and also the peaceful state which existed between the animals and Adam prior to his transgressing the commandment. For they came to him as though to a loving shepherd, passing in front of him without any fear, flock after flock according to their species and varieties. They had no fear of him, nor were they in trepidation of one another; a herd of predators passed by, followed fearlessly by a group of the animals upon which they preyed.

10. So Adam took care of the earth and became master of everything on this day, in accordance with the blessing he had received—for the word of the Creator had taken effect and his blessing had been fulfilled in actual fact. That very same day did he rule over everything; and even though Adam was quick to rebel against the Lord of all

9 note 1: Gen. 2:19.

note 2: cf Gen. 1:20.

things, God did not just give him the authority over all things that He had promised him, but in addition He gave him the right to allocate names, something that He had not promised him. Now if He had done more for him than what he had expected, how do you suppose He would have deprived him of what He had promised for any other reason than because he had sinned?

If it were a case of someone giving just a small number of names, the remembering of these would be nothing out of the ordinary, but to allocate thousands of names all in a single short moment, and to avoid any duplication between the first ones and the last, this is something which surpasses human ability. For someone to specify a multitude of names for a multitude of species—reptiles, wild animals, domestic cattle and birds—is quite possible, but to avoid ever calling one species by the name of another is something that belongs to God—or to a human being to whom this ability has been given by God. If God gave Adam authority, made him share in the act of creation, wrapped him in glory, and gave him the Garden, what else should He have done for him so that he might keep the commandment, but did not do?

11. After speaking about the fashioning of the animals and of the names they received, Scripture turns to describe Adam's sleep and the rib which was removed from him, and how woman [*or a wife*] was established, in the following words: "For Adam there was to be found no helper who resembled himself."¹ Scripture calls Eve "helper," seeing that, even if Adam had helpers among the animals and cattle, nevertheless a helper of his own kind would be useful to him. For Eve looked after things inside, caring for the sheep, oxen, herds, and flocks in the field; she also assisted him with the buildings and the sheepfolds, and

11 note 1: Gen. 2:20.

with the crafts that he invented. For even though the animals were subject to him, they were unable to assist him in these sorts of things. For that reason God made him a helper who would take care of everything along with him. And indeed she did assist him in all sorts of ways.

12. “The Lord cast a stillness on Adam and he slept; He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. And the Lord made the rib that He had taken from Adam into a woman, and He brought her to Adam.”¹ Now the man, who was wakeful,* anointed with radiance, and as yet ignorant of what sleep was, fell naked on the ground and slept. It is quite likely that he saw in his dream what was being done to him in waking life.

Once the rib had been extracted in the twinkling of an eye, and God had closed up the flesh in the flicker of an eyelid, and the bare rib had been fashioned with all kinds of adornments and embellishments, God then took her and brought her to Adam who was both one and two: he was one because he was Adam, he was two because he was created male and female.

13. Having spoken of the stillness, the extracted rib and the woman fashioned out of it who had been brought to him, Scripture describes how Adam said, “This time it is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh; let her be called woman, for she is taken from man.”¹ “This time” refers to the fact that she came after the animals and did not resemble them. For they came into being from the earth, whereas she “is bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh.” He may have said this of her as though in

12 note 1: Gen. 2:21-22.

13 note 1: Gen. 2:23

prophecy, or he knew it was the case from the visionary dream he had seen, as we suggested above.

Seeing that all species of animals had received from him a name on that very day, Adam did not call the rib that had been fashioned by her personal name "Eve," but called her instead "woman," the generic name applying to her entire kind.

He said "a man shall leave his father and his mother and attach himself to his wife"² so that they might be united and the two of them become one, without division, as they were originally.

14. Following this it says, "The two of them were naked, but they were not ashamed."¹ It was not because they were ignorant of what shame was that they were not ashamed; for had they been infants,* as the pagans say, Scripture would not have said that "they were naked but were not ashamed," nor would it have spoken of "Adam and his wife" had they not been adults. The names which Adam gave should convince us of his wisdom, and the fact that it says that "he was to work it and guard it" is to indicate his strength. Likewise, the law laid down for them is meant to testify to their adulthood—and the transgression of the law to testify to their arrogance.

It was because of the glory in which they were wrapped that they were not ashamed. Once this had been taken away from them, after the transgression of the commandment, they were ashamed because they had been stripped of it, and the two of them rushed to the leaves in order to cover not so much their bodies as their shameful members.

15. Having spoken of their naked state—which, because

13 note 2: Gen. 2:24.

14 note 1: Gen. 2:25.

it was adorned with a heavenly raiment, was not shameful—Scripture turns to write about the astuteness of the serpent, as follows: “And the serpent was more astute than all the other wild animals that the Lord had made.”¹ Now even though it was astute, it was only more astute than the dumb animals which are under the control of mankind: it had not yet, just by reason of its having surpassed the level of animals in its astuteness, been raised to the level of mankind. That irrational creature was only more astute than the cattle; that mindless serpent was only more crafty than other animals. For it is clear that the serpent did not have a human mind, seeing that it did not possess human wisdom; whereas Adam, who surpassed the serpent in the way he was fashioned, by having a soul and an intellect, by his glory and by his location, clearly also infinitely surpassed the serpent in astuteness. For Adam, who had been set in authority and control over animals, was wiser than all the animals, and he who gave names to them all was certainly more astute than them all. For just as Israel could not look upon the face of Moses,² neither were the animals able to look upon the radiance of Adam and Eve: at the time when they received names from him they passed in front of Adam with their eyes down, since their eyes were incapable of taking in his glory. So even though the serpent was more astute than the other animals, compared to Adam and Eve, who had authority over animals, it was foolish.

16. Having spoken of the serpent’s astuteness, it turns to describe how the deceitful one came to Eve, as follows: “And the serpent said to the woman, ‘Did God really tell you not to eat of any of the trees of Paradise?’”¹ On the

15 note 1: Gen. 3:1.

note 2: Exod. 34:33-35 (Moses’ descent from Mt Sinai).

16 note 1: Gen. 3:1.

matter of the serpent's words: either Adam knew the serpent's own language, or Satan spoke through it*; or the serpent asked the question mentally, and speech was granted it, or Satan asked God that speech should temporarily be granted to the serpent.

Now the tempter's words would not have caused the tempted pair to sin had not their greed abetted the tempter. And even if the tempter had not come, the Tree with all its beauty would have caused them a struggle with their greed. In other words, they used the serpent's counsel as an excuse, for it was their own greed, which conformed with the serpent's counsel and went beyond it, that brought harm upon them.

17. For it says, "The woman saw that the Tree was good to eat, and was delightful to the eyes; and the Tree was enticing to look upon, and so she took some of its fruit and ate."¹ Now if she was overcome by the Tree's beauty and by desire for its fruit, she was not overcome by the counsel that had entered her ear, seeing that she was defeated by the greed which issued from within herself.

Seeing that a commandment had been laid down for the tempted pair, it was appropriate that the tempter should come momentarily. Now because God had given to Adam everything inside and outside Paradise through Grace, requiring nothing in return, either for his creation, or for the glory in which He had clothed him, nevertheless out of Justice He held back one tree from him to whom He had given, in Grace, everything in Paradise and on earth, in the air and in the seas. For when God created Adam, He did not make him mortal, nor did He fashion him as immortal; this was so that Adam himself, either through keeping the commandment, or by transgressing it, might

17 note 1: Gen. 3:6.

acquire from this one of the trees whichever outcome he wanted.

God had created the Tree of Life and hidden it from Adam and Eve, first, so that it should not, with its beauty, stir up conflict with them and so double their struggle, and also because it was inappropriate that they should be observant of the commandment of Him who cannot be seen for the sake of a reward that was there before their eyes.

Even though God had given them everything else out of Grace, He wished to confer on them, out of Justice, the immortal life which is granted through eating of the Tree of Life. He therefore laid down this commandment. Not that it was a large commandment, commensurate with the superlative reward that was in preparation for them; no, He only withheld from them a single tree, just so that they might be subject to a commandment. But He gave them the whole of Paradise, so that they would not feel any compulsion to transgress the law.

18. Because a tempter was required, as I mentioned, Satan was not allowed to have one of the Watchers, or one of the Seraphim or Cherubim, sent to Adam for this purpose; nor was Satan allowed to come to Adam in the Garden in human appearance, or in the divine appearance in which he came to our Lord on the mountain.¹ Nor did any of the huge and renowned animals, such as Behemoth or Leviathan, come; nor did any of the other animals, or any of the ritually clean cattle, lest some excuse might be found by [or for] the transgressors of the commandment. Instead, a mere serpent was allowed to come to them, which, even if it was astute, was nevertheless utterly despised and despicable.

Moreover, when the serpent came, it did not do so performing any signs, or even fashioning some false appari-

18 note 1: Matt. 4:1-11 and parallels.

tion; no, it came just by itself in its mean state, with downcast eyes seeing that it was unable to look upon the radiance of her who was being tempted by this creature. Out of fear it did not go to Adam, but went instead to Eve, in order quickly to get her to eat of the Tree from which she had been told not to eat. And this was when she had not yet tasted of the thousands and ten thousands of other trees that had been granted her. And the reason for her not having tasted them was not because she was fasting; rather, hunger had not yet gained any hold over her, for she had only just been created at that very time.

The entire reason the serpent was not prevented from coming hastily was because the serpent's very haste worked against the serpent. For it was the moment that Eve had been created, and she did not yet know what hunger was; and up to now she had not been tormented by any struggle over the Tree's beauty. So, because she was not hungry and was not struggling with the Tree, the serpent was not prevented from becoming a tempter.

If she had vanquished it in a momentary fight, in a struggle lasting but a short time, the serpent—and he who was in the serpent—would still have received the punishment which in the event they received, while she and her husband would have eaten of the Tree of Life and lived forever; with the promised life that they would have acquired through Justice, they would also have had, through Justice, everything that previously they had been given through Grace.

So the tempter made haste to come, and was not prevented. This was so that they might realize that he was the tempter, by the fact that the tempter came at the same time as the commandment, and in this way they would be wary of his deceitfulness. He who was unable to provide himself with even a small reputation came along and gave them momentous counsel.

19. Satan, who was in the serpent, spoke through the serpent to the woman: "Did God really say that you should not eat of any of the trees of Paradise?"¹ It is right that we should realize that, had they been commanded not to eat of any of the trees, as the serpent said, it would have been a big commandment. Whereas in fact they were commanded exactly the opposite, as it were, no commandment at all seeing that it was so small and had been given only temporarily, until the tempter had gone away from them.

Now Eve replied, saying to the serpent, "From the fruits of the trees in Paradise we may eat, but from the fruits of the Tree in the middle of Paradise He told us not to eat and not to approach it, lest we die."² The serpent, and he who was in the serpent, having heard that all the trees of Paradise had been provided for fruit, and only one had been withheld from them, supposed themselves to be wrapped in shame, seeing that there was no opportunity for counseling disobedience.

20. Accordingly, the tempter observed the commandment of God the giver of commandments, how not only had they been forbidden to eat of it, but they were not to approach it at all; and he realized that God had forewarned them away from seeing the Tree, lest they be captivated by its beauty. So, luring Eve to look at it, he said, "It is not the case that you will die, for God knows that the day you eat of these fruits your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God, knowing good and evil."¹ Now Eve omitted to look carefully at the serpent's words, at how the tempter had said exactly the opposite of what had been uttered by God; and she failed to answer him back and say, "How can my eyes be opened, seeing

19 note 1: Gen. 3:1.

note 2: Gen. 3:2-3.

20 note 1: Gen. 3:4-5.

that they are not closed?" and "How will I know the difference between good and evil by eating the fruit, seeing that I already know this before eating it?" But she neglected everything that she should have said in opposition to the serpent, and, just as the serpent had desired, she raised her eyes from the serpent in front of her and gazed at the Tree she had been commanded not to approach. Now the serpent kept quiet, for it already perceived her guilt. For it was not so much the counsel that had entered her ear that lured her on to eat of the Tree, but rather her gaze, which she had focused on the Tree, enticed her to pluck and eat some of its fruit.

She could very well have said to the serpent, "If I cannot see, how is it that I see everything that is to be seen? And if I do not know the difference between good and evil, how could I discern whether your counsel is good or evil? How would I know that divinity was good and the opening of the eyes an excellent thing, and whence would I recognize that death is evil? But all this is available to me; so why have you come to me? Your coming to us bears witness that we possess these very things; for with the sight that I have, and with the ability to distinguish what is good from what is evil that I possess, I will test your counsel. If I already have the things which you have promised, where is all this cunning of yours which has failed to hide your deception?"

She did not say these things whereby she might have defeated the serpent, but instead she fixed her gaze on the Tree, thereby hastening her own defeat. Thus, following her desire and enticed by the divinity which the serpent had promised her, she ate furtively, away from her husband. Only subsequently did she give it to her husband, and he ate with her. Because she had believed the serpent, she ate first, imagining that she would return clothed in divinity to her husband whom she had left as a woman. She hastily ate before her husband so that she might become

head over her head, and that she might be giving orders to him from whom she received orders, seeing that she had become senior in divinity to Adam to whom she was junior in humanity.

21. When she had eaten, she neither grew nor shrank; nor did she acquire enlightenment. For she did not receive the divinity she had been looking to, nor did she find the enlightenment that brings one to Paradise. She took the fruit to her husband and, with many entreaties, got him to eat it—though it is not written that she entreated him.¹

Having once eaten, Eve did not die as God had said, nor did she find divinity, as the serpent had said. For had she been exposed, Adam would have been afraid and would not have eaten, in which case, even though he would not have been guilty in that he did not eat, yet he would not have been victorious either, seeing that he would not have been tempted. It would have been the exposing of his wife that would have restrained him from eating rather than love for, or fear of, Him who gave the commandment. It was so that Adam might for a moment be tempted by Eve's blandishments—just as she had been by the counsel of the serpent—that she had approached and eaten, but had not been exposed.

22. Once Eve had enticed Adam and gotten him to eat, Scripture says that "the eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew that they were naked."¹ So their eyes were opened, not that they might become like God, as the serpent had said, but that they might see their own exposure, just as the enemy had hoped. For their eyes had thus been both open and closed: open, in that they could

21 note 1: cf Gen. 3:6.

22 note 1: Gen. 3:7.

see everything; but closed, in that they did not see either the Tree of Life or their own exposure.

The enemy was envious* for this reason too, because they surpassed everything on earth in possessing glory and reason, and eternal life which is provided by the Tree of Life was promised to them alone. Thus the enemy was envious of Adam and Eve both for what they had and for what they were to receive; accordingly, he plotted against them and in the course of a momentary struggle he took from them what they should not have lost even if it meant a great struggle.

23. For had the serpent been rejected, along with the sin, they would have eaten of the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge would not have been withheld from them any longer; from the one they would have acquired infallible knowledge, and from the other they would have received immortal life. They would have acquired divinity* in humanity; and had they thus acquired infallible knowledge and immortal life they would have done so in this body.

Thus by what it promised, the serpent annulled what they were to have had: it made them think that they would receive this by transgressing the commandment, thus effecting that they would not receive it as a result of keeping the commandment. It withheld divinity from them by means of the divinity which it promised them, and it brought about that those, to whom it had promised enlightenment from the Tree of Knowledge, should not have their eyes illumined by the Tree of Life, as promised.

Now had they been willing to repent after transgressing the commandment, even though they would not have received what they had possessed prior to their transgression, nevertheless they would have escaped from the curses pronounced over the earth and over themselves. For the whole reason for God's delay in coming down to them

was in case they might rebuke one another and so, when the Judge did come to them, they might ask for mercy. The serpent's arrival was not delayed, so that their temptation at the beautiful sight of the Tree might not be too great. The Judge, on the other hand, did delay in coming to them, in order to give them an opportunity to prepare a plea. However, the haste on the part of the tempter did not help them, even though this haste was designed to help them; nor did they profit from the Judge's delay, even though His delay, too, was intended for that very purpose.

24. "And they heard the sound [*or* voice] of the Lord as He walked in Paradise at the turn of the day; and they hid themselves from the Lord's presence among the trees in Paradise."¹

It was not just by the patience that He showed toward them that He wanted to help them, but He also wanted the sound of His footsteps to assist them; for He caused His silent footsteps to make a noise so that, at the noise, they might prepare to make supplication before Him who issued the sound. When, however, they failed to appear before Him with supplication, either as a result of His delay or because of the sound that had been sent forth in advance of Him, God then went on to employ the sound of His lips, just as He had used the sound of His footsteps, saying "Where are you, Adam?"² But instead of confessing his wrong and asking mercy before sentence was pronounced over him, Adam said, "I heard the sound of You in Paradise and I was afraid, for I saw that I was naked and so I hid myself."³

The sound of feet which went before the God who was about to be revealed to Adam and Eve in punishment pre-

24 note 1: Gen. 3:8.

note 2: Gen. 3:9.

note 3: Gen. 3:10.

figured the voice of John* who was to come before the Son, holding a winnowing fan in his hands as he cleans his threshing floors, about to burn the chaff in fire and clean the wheat in order to bring it into his storehouses.⁴

25. "I heard the sound of You and I hid myself."¹ When had you heard the sound of Him as you do now? For you did not hear His sound when He fashioned you and brought you into Paradise, nor when He cast a stillness upon you and extracted your rib, constructing and bringing to you a wife. If it is only just recently that you have heard the sound of Him, you should realize even now that this sound of footsteps was made in order that your lips might make supplication. Speak to Him before He questions you about the coming of the serpent and about your and Eve's transgression, in case the confession of your lips might absolve you of the sin of eating the fruit which your fingers plucked.

But they failed to confess anything about what they had done; instead, they told the Omniscient what had happened to them.

26. "Where are you, Adam? In the state of divinity which the serpent promised you? Or subject to death which I pronounced over you, should you look to the fruits?

Now suppose, Adam, that instead of the utterly despicable serpent there had come to you an angel, or another divine being, would it have been right for you to despise the command of Him who gave you all these things and instead to listen to the counsel of one who had not yet in actual fact performed anything good for you? Would you consider as evil Him who fashioned you out of nothing and made you a second god over creation, instead holding to be good one who had merely with words promised you

24 note 4: cf Matt. 3:12.

25 note 1: Gen. 3:10.

some advantage? And if it would not be right for you to be deceived by the counsel of some other god, were he to come to you with a show of force, how much more so when it is a serpent that has come to you, without any mighty acts or miracles, but with only the bare words which it addressed to you? You have held your God to be false and your deceiver to be true; you have broken faith with your Benefactor who put you in authority over everything, and you have believed that deceiver who has cunningly managed to take away your authority completely.”

Had the serpent been prevented from coming to tempt Adam, the people who today complain about its having come would be complaining about its having been prevented from coming; for they would be saying that the serpent—who in fact came so that Adam might acquire eternal life by means of a short-lived temptation—had been prevented from doing so out of envy. And those who now say that Adam would never have gone astray if the serpent had not come would instead be saying that had the serpent come, Adam would not have gone astray. For, just as they imagine that they are doing well by saying, “Had the serpent not come, Adam and Eve would not have gone astray,” all the more so would they imagine that they did well by saying, “Had the serpent come, it would not have led Adam and Eve astray.” Indeed, who would ever have believed it, had it not actually happened, that Adam should have listened to a serpent or Eve been won over by a reptile!

27. “I heard the sound of You, and I was afraid and hid myself.”²¹ Because Adam omitted what was requisite and instead said something that was not required—for instead of confessing what he had done, which would have benefited him, he related what had happened to him,

27 note 1: Gen. 3:10.

which did not benefit him—God said to him, “Who showed you that you are naked? You have eaten of the Tree from which I commanded you not to eat.² You have seen your own nakedness with the help of the vision which the Tree bestowed upon you—the same that had promised you a glorious vision of divinity.”

Once again Adam failed to confess his fault, laying the blame on the woman who was like him: “The woman with whom you provided me gave me of the Tree and I ate.³ I myself did not approach the Tree, nor was it my hand which presumed to stretch out for the fruit.” This is why the Apostle too says, “Adam himself did not sin, but Eve transgressed the commandment.”⁴

But if He gave you a wife, Adam, He gave her as a helper and not as a harmer, as someone who receives instructions, rather than as one who gives orders.

28. When Adam was unwilling to confess his fault, God went down to Eve with a question, saying to her, “What is this that you have done?”¹ Eve, too, instead of making supplication with tears and taking the fault upon herself in the hope that pardon might come upon herself and her husband, answered back, not saying, “The serpent counseled me” or “enticed me,” but simply, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.”²

29. When the two of them had been questioned and found to be lacking in contrition or valid excuse, God descended to the serpent, not with a question, but with a punishment. For where there was a possibility of repentance He made use of questions, but with a creature that is

27 note 2: Gen. 3:11.

note 3: Gen. 3:12.

note 4: 1 Tim. 2:14.

28 note 1: Gen. 3:13.

note 2: Gen. 3:13.

alien to repentance He employed a sentence of judgment. And you should realize that the serpent cannot repent from the fact that, when God said to it, "Because you have done this you are more cursed than all cattle,"¹ it did not say "I did not do it" because it was afraid to lie, nor did it say "I did it," because it was alien to repentance.

"You are more cursed than all cattle because you deceived those who have authority over all cattle; and instead of being more astute than all other animals you shall be more cursed than all other animals, and you shall go about on your belly because you brought pangs upon womankind. And you shall eat dust all the days of your life² because you deprived Adam and Eve of the food of the Tree of Life. And I will place enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed³ because by your fraudulent show of love you deceived and subjected both her and her children to death."

He then indicates the nature of the enmity which was placed between the serpent and the woman, between its seed and hers, saying, "It shall tread upon your head—which wanted to escape from subjugation to her seed—and you will strike it, not in its organ of hearing, but in its heel."⁴

30. Now even though the sentence imposed on the serpent was justly decreed—for punishment reverts to where the crime originated—nevertheless the full reason God began with this despicable creature was so that Adam and Eve might become afraid and repent while Justice was appeasing its anger on the serpent: then there would be an opportunity for Grace to hold them back from Justice's curses.

29 note 1: Gen. 3:14.

note 2: Gen. 3:14.

note 3: Gen. 3:15.

note 4: Gen. 3:15.

When the serpent had been cursed, however, and Adam and Eve still did not ask forgiveness, God then came with punishment. He came to Eve, since it was by her hand that the sin had been handed over to Adam. Thus he decreed as follows against Eve: "I will greatly multiply your pains and your conceptions, and you shall give birth to children with pangs."¹

Even though she would have given birth to children anyway—seeing that she had received the blessing of childbirth along with all creatures—nevertheless she would not have given birth to many children, because those whom she bore would have remained immortal. And she would have been spared the pangs of birthgiving, the anguish of their upbringing and the lamentations at their deaths.

"And you shall turn to your husband"—to be counseled, and not to counsel—"and he shall have authority over you"²—since you imagined that by eating the fruit you would from then onward have authority over him.

31. After He had decreed concerning Eve and repentance failed to spring up in Adam, He then turned to him as well in punishment, saying, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and were wheedled into eating of the Tree from which I told you not to eat, cursed is the earth because of you."¹

Although it was the earth, which had not done wrong, which was smitten instead of Adam, who had done wrong, nevertheless it was Adam, who is subject to suffering, whom He caused to suffer by means of the curse on the earth, which is not subject to suffering; for it was because of the earth's being cursed that Adam, who had not been directly cursed, was cursed. Thus he did not escape punishment at

30 note 1: Gen. 3:16.

note 2: Gen. 3:16.

31 note 1: cf Gen. 3:17.

the curse which the earth received, for God decreed concerning him too, as follows: "With pains shall you eat of it all the days of your life—that is, after breaking the commandment, though you would have eaten of it without any pains had the commandment been kept. Thorns and thistles will it bring forth after the sin, things which it would not have brought forth had there been no sin. You shall eat herbage of the field, because through your wife's slight enticement you have rejected Paradise's delectable fruits. With the sweat of your face will you eat bread, because it did not please you to enjoy yourself without any toil in the delights of the Garden. All this will be your portion until you return to the earth whence you were taken, seeing that you despised the commandment which, at the very present moment, might have given you eternal life, by means of the fruit of the Tree of Life which you would have been permitted to eat. Since you originate from dust and you forgot yourself, you shall return to your dust and your true being shall be recognized through your low estate."²

32. Even Satan, who was created within these six days along with the womb to which he belonged, was fair until the sixth day, just as Adam and Eve were fair up to the time they transgressed the commandment. Now Satan, who had become Satan in secret on this day, was also secretly sentenced and condemned the same day; for God did not wish to make known his judgment in the presence of the pair who were not aware of his having tempted them—the woman said "It was the serpent," and not Satan, "who led me astray." So Satan was judged secretly, and in him all his hosts were condemned. For since the sin was so great, and any one of them alone would have been too insignificant for the punishment—just as birth pangs were decreed

31 note 2: cf Gen. 3:17-19, expanded.

for Eve along with her daughters, and pains and death for Adam and his children, and for the serpent it was decreed that it and all its seed should be trampled—so it was decreed against Satan who was in the serpent that he should go to the fire along with all his hosts. For in the New Testament our Lord revealed what had been hidden in the old, when he said, “Concerning the judgment of the ruler of this world, he is judged,” that is, he is condemned.¹

33. Having spoken of the punishment which the tempter and those tempted received, Scripture describes how “the Lord made garments of skin* for Adam and Eve, and clothed them.”¹ Whether these garments were from the skins of animals, or whether they were specially created, like the thorn bushes and thistles which were created after the other works of creation had been completed, seeing that it is said that “the Lord made . . . and clothed them,” it seems likely that when their hands were laid upon their leaves they found themselves clothed with garments made of skin. Or were, perhaps, some animals killed before them, so that they could nourish themselves with their flesh, cover up their nakedness with their skins, and in their deaths see the death of their own bodies?

34. Having finished this it says, “Behold, Adam has become like one of us, knowing good and evil.”¹ By saying that “he has become like one of us,” Scripture also revealed symbolically something about the Trinity.* But at the same time God was actually addressing Adam ironically, seeing that Adam had been told, “you will become like God, knowing good and evil.”

However, although Adam and Eve became aware of

32 note 1: John 16:11.

33 note 1: Gen. 3:21.

34 note 1: Gen. 3:22.

both these things from eating the fruit, prior to the fruit they were in practice only aware of the good, hearing about evil by report, but after eating it there was a change, so that they only heard by report of the good, whereas they tasted evil in practice. For the glory in which they had been wrapped left them, and the pains which had previously been kept away from them now dominated them.

35. "And now, lest he stretch out his hand and take from the fruit of the Tree of Life as well, and eat it and live for ever . . ." ¹ For if he had the audacity to eat of the Tree of which he was commanded not to eat, how much the more would he make a dash for the Tree concerning which he had received no commandment? But because it had been decreed against them that they should exist in toil and sweat, in pains and pangs, God, who when they were still free from the curse and clothed in glory was prepared to give them immortal life, now that they were clothed in the curse, kept them back from eating of the Tree of Life, lest by eating of it and living forever, they would have to remain in a life of pain for eternity.

God's intention, then, was that this life-giving gift, which they would have received from the Tree of Life, might not be turned to misery and actually harm them even more than what they had acquired through the Tree of Knowledge. For from the Tree of Knowledge they had acquired temporal pains, whereas the Tree of Life would have made those pains eternal. From the Tree of Knowledge they had acquired death which would release them from the bonds of their pains, whereas the Tree of Life would have made them entombed all their lives, leaving them forever tortured by their pains. So it was that God kept them back from the Tree of Life, for it was not appropriate, either

35 note 1: Gen. 3:22.

that a life of delight should be provided in the land of curses, or that eternal life should be found in the transient world.

Had they eaten, however, one of two things would have happened: either the sentence of death would have been proved false, or the life-giving characteristic of the Tree of Life would have been proved not to be genuine. In order, therefore, that the sentence of death might not be annulled, and the life-giving characteristic of the Tree might not be proved false, God kept Adam at a distance from it, lest he suffer loss from the Tree of Life as well, just as he had already been harmed by the Tree of Knowledge.

God now sends him "to work the earth from which he had been taken,"² so that he who had been harmed by the ease in the Garden might be benefited by toil on the earth.

36. At his departure from Paradise it says that God "caused a cherub and a sharp revolving sword to go round, to the east of the Garden of Eden, to protect the way to the Tree of Life."¹ The barrier was thus a living one, which of its own accord went around guarding the way to the Tree of Life from anyone who audaciously wanted to pluck its fruit; for it would kill with its sharp sword any mortal who came to steal for himself immortal life.

35 note 2: Gen. 3:23.

36 note 1: Gen. 3:24.

Notes to Section II of the Commentary on Genesis

(Marked with asterisks in the text)

- II.1 *Scripture*: the subject of the verb in this frequently occurring phrase is mostly left unexpressed.
already spoken of: in Genesis 1. St Ephrem sees Gen. 1 as giving the chronological framework for creation, while Gen. 2-3 go back and expand on certain details.
- II.4 *wrapped him in glory*: for Adam's original "Robe of Glory" see the Introduction.
- II.5 *of old*: the Hebrew can be understood as "from the East" or "of old"; see the Introduction.
- II.6 *Pishon . . . Danube*: various identifications of the river Pishon are found in early Jewish and Christian writers (the Ganges and the Don are among the other candidates). The identification of the Gihon as the Nile is standard.
water pipe: Ephrem uses the Greek word *sōlēn*. It is interesting that in pagan writers this imagery is sometimes used to denote the descent of the soul into the body. Ephrem clearly wants to emphasize that Paradise and earth belong to two different orders of being (on this point, see also the Introduction).
- II.7 *till (worship) . . . keep (guard)*: The Syriac (and Hebrew) text of Genesis 2:15 is ambiguous. In the following paragraph Ephrem seeks to show that "keep" makes much better exegetical sense, with the commandment as the object. This is in line with the rendering of the verse in the Palestinian Targum tradition: "The Lord God took Adam and caused him to dwell in the Garden of Eden, to labor with the Law and to keep His commandment." On this interpretation the beginning of Genesis 2:16 will have been under-

stood in the sense "Now the Lord God *had* commanded . . ." *barrier* (syāgā): for this term see the Introduction.

- II.8 *a single tree*: throughout his exegesis of Genesis 2-3 Ephrem is at pains to point out that Adam and Eve had absolutely no excuse for their transgression of God's commandment, and that they then failed to take advantage of His patience and efforts to get them to repent of their sin.
- II.12 *wakeful*: the word can also be translated "a Watcher," a term for angelic beings which Ephrem derives from the book of Daniel (cf Hymn VI.23). For the ideal of the angelic life, see the Introduction.
- II.14 *infants*: though Ephrem attributes this view to "pagans" (literally "those outside"; perhaps some heretical Christian group is really meant), it is also found in several early Christian writers such as Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolycus* II.25); indeed Ephrem himself speaks of their *shabrūthā*, "childlike state," in the Paradise Hymns (VII.6, XV.12.14), but, as Beck points out in his commentary (pp. 67-8), the term there is not to be understood literally but rather it must have the metaphorical sense of "inexperience." Compare Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, pp. 304-6.
- II.16 *Satan spoke through it*: for Satan as the hidden instigator see Wisdom of Solomon 2:24.
- II.22 *The enemy was envious*: according to a widespread Jewish tradition Satan's fall came about through envy at the glorious state in which Adam had originally been created.
- II.23 *They would have acquired divinity*: see Introduction.
- II.24 *prefigured the voice of John*: this is one of the rare passages in the Commentary on Genesis where specific reference is made to a New Testament theme.
- II.33 *garments of skin*: the phrase gave rise to a great deal of speculation, and a number of very different explanations were put forward, notably:
 1. The Hebrew word was read as 'wr, "light," instead of 'wr, "skin," and the verse was taken to refer to the pre-Fall state (i.e. "God had made"). This is found in some early Jewish texts and it is the source of the phrases "robe of light/glory," so common in Syriac writers (see Introduction). A variant on this interpretation, found in the Jewish Targums, takes the "garments of glory"

to refer to Adam's priestly garments which he took from Paradise.

2. The garments were indeed of animal skin (a possibility which Ephrem envisages), but the implication that an animal had previously been killed led some to suppose that:
3. the "skin" was in fact the bark from trees. This view was adopted by many later Syriac writers, basing themselves on Theodore of Mopsuestia.
4. The "garments of skin" were taken by some (notably Origen) to refer to the human body, implying that the pre-Fall body had been of a different order.

II.34 *Trinity*: Ephrem, in common with most of the Fathers, understands passages where God speaks in the first person plural (such as Gen. 3:22) as pointing to the Trinity.

4.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The translation is made from Dom Edmund Beck's edition of the Syriac text in *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, volume 174 (= *Scriptores Syri*, volume 78; Louvain, 1957). This edition replaces the earlier partial editions by Assemani (Hymns I-XII) and Overbeck (Hymns XII-XV). There are three modern translations of the complete cycle: in German (by Beck in CSCO 175 = *Scr. Syri* 79), in Latin (by Beck in his *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies*, on which see below), and in French (by R. Lavenant, with introduction and notes by F. Graffin, in *Sources chrétiennes* 137, 1968). All these I have consulted with profit, even though my understanding of some obscure passages may differ from theirs.

Dom E. Beck has provided a valuable running commentary, accompanied by a Latin translation, in *Ephraems Hymnen über das Paradies* (*Studia Anselmiana* 26, 1951). Much in the way of commentary that is relevant to the cycle will also be found in T. Kronholm's *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Lund, 1978).

On specific aspects or points of detail in the Hymns on Paradise the following are available:

E. Beck, "Eine christliche Parallele zu den Paradiesesjungfrauen des Korans?" *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 14 (1948), pp. 398-405. (On VII.18).

_____, "Les Houris du Coran et Ephrem le Syrien," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'Etudes orientales du Caire* 6 (1961), pp. 405-8. (On VII.18).

_____, "Ephräms Hymnus de Paradiso XV.1-8," *Oriens Christianus* 62 (1978), pp. 24-35.

- J. Daniélou, "Terre et Paradis chez les Pères de l'Eglise," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 1953 (vol. 22, Zurich, 1954), pp. 433-72.
- _____, "Catéchèse pascalle et retour au Paradis," *La Maison-Dieu* 45 (1956), pp. 99-119.
- T. Kronholm, "The Trees of Paradise in the Hymns of Ephrem Syrus," *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 12 (1978), pp. 48-56.
- R. Murray, "The Lance which re-opened Paradise," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), pp. 224-34, 401.
- I. Ortiz de Urbina, "Le Paradis eschatologique d'après Saint Ephrem," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 21 (1955), pp. 467-72.
- N. Sed, "Les hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Ephrem et les traditions juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968), pp. 455-501.
- J. Teixidor, "Le thème de la descente aux enfers chez saint Ephrem," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961), pp. 25-40.
- P. Yousif, "Le croix de Jésus et le Paradis d'Éden," *Parole d'Orient* 6/7 (1975/6), pp. 29-48.

For more general introductions to St Ephrem's thought the following may be mentioned:

- T. Bou Mansour, *La pensée symbolique de Saint Ephrem Le Syrien* (Kaslik, 1988).
- S. P. Brock, "The poet as theologian," *Sobornost* VII:4 (1977), pp. 243-50.
- _____, *The Harp of the Spirit: Eighteen Poems of St Ephrem* (2nd edition, London, 1983).
- _____, *The Luminous Eye: the Spiritual World Vision of St Ephrem* (Rome, 1985; Kalamazoo, 1990).
- A. de Halleux, "Saint Ephrem le Syrien," *Revue théologique de Louvain* 14 (1983), pp. 328-55.
- _____, "Mar Ephrem, théologien," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973), pp. 35-54.
- _____, "Ephräm der Syrer," in M. Greschat (ed.), *Gestalten der Kirchengeschichte*, I (Stuttgart, 1984), pp. 284-301.
- N. El-Khoury, *Die Interpretation der Welt bei Ephraem dem Syrer* (Mainz, 1976).
- L. Leloir, "L'actualité du message d'Ephrem," *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973) pp. 55-72.
- J. Martikainen, "Ephraem der Syrer," in H. Fries and G. Kretschmar (eds.), *Klassiker der Theologie*, I (Munich, 1981), pp. 62-75.
- R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1975).

_____, "The theory of symbolism in St Ephrem's theology," *Parole de l'Orient* 6/7 (1975/6), pp. 1-20. (There is a French translation of this important article in *Lettre de Ligugé* 203 (1980), pp. 7-25).

P. Yousif, *L'Eucharistie chez Saint Ephrem de Nisibe* (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 224, 1984).

Several reliable encyclopedia articles are available: E. Beck in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* and *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, L. Leloir in *Dictionnaire d'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastique*, and R. Murray in *Catholic Dictionary of Theology* and *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*. A fairly detailed introduction to St Ephrem's hymns, their syllabic patterns and their transmission, entitled "Materials for the study of the writings of St Ephrem," is to appear in the series *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*.

A convenient listing of the Greek texts attributed to Ephrem will be found in M. Geerard, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* II (Turnhout, 1974), pp. 366-468; the best introduction to this material is provided by D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* IV, col. 800-819, supplemented by her article in *Epetēris Hetaireias Byzantinōn Spoudōn* 42 (1975/6), pp. 320-73.

A bibliography of works on St Ephrem is provided in *Parole de l'Orient* 4 (1973) and (for 1971-85) *Parole de l'Orient* 10 (1983) and 14 (1987).

St Ephrem's works

The earliest printed editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were of works in Latin and Greek attributed to St Ephrem, and it was not until the eighteenth century, with the massive six-volume Roman edition (1732-46), edited by P. Benedictus (Möbarak) and S. E. Assemani, that any of the Syriac originals became available to the European world. The nineteenth century witnessed further editions, by J. J. Overbeck and T. J. Lamy, but in all these volumes the genuine and spurious were juxtaposed with little serious attempt to separate them out. A useful (and very necessary) guide to the three Syriac volumes of the Roman edition was provided by F. C. Burkitt in his *S. Ephraim's Quotations from the Gospels* (Cambridge, 1901), one of the first real efforts to isolate the genuine works. It was, however, only in the 1950s that reliable editions of these genuine works, based on the earliest available manuscripts, started to appear in the *Corpus of Oriental Christian*

Writers (CSCO), published at Louvain in Belgium. The great hymn cycles are now all available in this series, along with several of the verse homilies.

St Ephrem's main works are listed below, with references to translations where available. The following abbreviations are employed:

CSCO = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (the first volume listed contains the text, the second the translation, usually German).

Gwynn = J. Gwynn (ed.), in *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 13 (1898).

Morris = J. B. Morris, *Select Works of St Ephrem the Syrian* (Oxford, 1847).

PO = *Patrologia Orientalis*.

SS = *Scriptores Syri* (subdivision of CSCO).

The hymn cycles (madrāshē)

1. Hymns on Faith (87 hymns): CSCO 154-5 = SS 73-4. English translation (not always reliable, being based on the poor Roman edition) in Morris. There is a valuable study by E. Beck in *Studia Anselmiana* 21 (1949).
A more recent translation of nos. 14, 73 and 82 is given in *The Harp of the Spirit*; nos. 10 and 20 are translated by R. Murray in *Eastern Churches Review* 3 (1970) and *Parole de l'Orient* 6/7 (1975/6) respectively, and no. 18 by P. Yousif in *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1978).
2. Hymns on Nisibis (77 hymns): CSCO 218-9, 240-1 = SS 92-3. English translation of nos. 1-21, 35-42 and 52-68 in Gwynn, and of 36, 50, 52 and 69 in *The Harp of the Spirit*.
3. Hymns against Heresies (56 hymns): CSCO 169-70 = SS 76-7.
4. Hymns on Virginity (52 hymns): CSCO 223-4 = SS 94-5. English translation of no. 31 by R. Murray in *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 1 (1979); of 7 and 33 in *The Harp of the Spirit*.
5. Hymns on the Church (52 hymns): CSCO 198-9 = SS 84-5. English translation of no. 9 by R. Murray in *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 2 (1980), and of no. 36 by S. P. Brock in *Eastern Churches Review* 7 (1976).
6. Hymns on the Nativity (28 Hymns): CSCO 186-7 = SS 82-3.

The same volume contains thirteen hymns on Epiphany which are probably not by Ephrem, but nevertheless early. English translations of most of these two collections can be found in Gwynn; no. 11 on the Nativity also appears in *The Harp of the Spirit*.

7. Hymns on Unleavened Bread (21 hymns), on the Crucifixion (9 hymns), and on the Resurrection (5 hymns): CSCO 248-9 = SS 108-9. English translation of the third hymn on Unleavened Bread, and of hymns 1 and 2 on the Resurrection, in *The Harp of the Spirit*.
8. Hymns on Paradise (15 hymns): CSCO 174-5 = SS 78-9. Translated here.
9. Hymns on the Fast (10 hymns): CSCO 246-7 = SS 106-7. English translation of no. 6 in *The Harp of the Spirit*.
10. Hymns preserved only in Armenian (51 hymns): PO 30 (with Latin translation). English translation of no. 49 in *The Harp of the Spirit*.
11. Of doubtful authenticity are the Hymns on Abraham of Qidun and on Julian the Elder (Juliana Saba), in CSCO 322-3 = SS 140-1, and those on the Confessors in CSCO 363-4 = SS 159-60.

Verse homilies (mēmre)

1. 6 homilies on Faith: CSCO 212-3 = SS 88-9. English translation in Morris. There is an important study by E. Beck in *Studia Anselmiana* 33 (1953).
2. 16 homilies on Nicomedia (preserved only in Armenian): PO 37 (with French translation and extensive introduction).
3. Beck has published a series of volumes containing *mēmre* attributed to Ephrem, but only a few of these are genuine: *Sermones I-IV* and *Nachträge zu Ephraem Syrus*, CSCO 305-6 = SS 130-1; CSCO 311-2 = SS 134-5; CSCO 320-1 = SS 138-9; CSCO 334-5 = SS 148-9; and CSCO 363-4 = SS 159-60. Two verse homilies for which there are Greek translations are those on the Sinful Woman and on Jonah, both in *Sermones II* (English translation of the former in Gwynn, and of the latter by H. Burgess, *The Repentance of Nineveh* (London, 1853); the Greek text of the homily on Jonah is published in *Le Muséon* 80 (1967), reproduced in *Iōnas Ephraim tou Surou*

(Athens, 1984)). A translation of one of the homilies on the Virgin in *Nachträge* is provided in *The Harp of the Spirit*.

Works in artistic prose

1. Homily on our Lord: CSCO 270-1 = SS 116-7. English translation in Gwynn.
2. Letter to Publius: in *Le Muséon* 89 (1976), with English translation.

Prose works

1. Commentary on Genesis and Exodus: CSCO 152-3 = SS 71-2. An unpublished English translation of Comm. on Genesis by Katharine Refson is on deposit in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (MLitt. thesis, 1982); Spanish translation by A. Peral Torres (Madrid, 1978). Section II (on Gen. 2-3) is translated here.
2. Commentary on the Diatessaron: CSCO 137, 145 = Scr. Armeni 1-2 (complete text in Armenian translation), and L. Leloir, *Saint Ephrem, Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant* (Dublin, 1963), with an edition of what remains of the Syriac original. Complete French translation in *Sources chrétiennes* 121.
3. Commentaries on Acts and the Pauline Epistles (preserved only in Armenian). Only Latin translations are available, of the former in F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, *The Beginnings of Christianity*, vol. 3 (London, 1926), and of the latter by the Mekhitarist Fathers (Venice, 1893).
4. Other commentaries, on Old Testament books, are attributed to Ephrem, but most of these are not by him.
5. Polemical works: C. W. Mitchell, *S. Ephraim's Prose Refutations*, 2 volumes (London, 1912, 1921), with English translations.

Among the inauthentic prose works attributed to Ephrem is an interesting letter to mountain ascetics (CSCO 334-5 = SS 148-9).

[An extensive selection of hymns in English translation can now be found in K. E. McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns* (Classics of Western Spirituality, 1989)].

Index 1: Biblical References

(To the Hymns Hymn and Stanza, R = Response)

- Gen. 1:27 VI.5
2:8 V.5
2:9 III.3, XII.15
2:10 XI.11
2:17 III.3
2:20 XII.16
3:4-5 XII.2
3:7 II.7, III.5
3:14 VI.8
3:17 XIII.9
3:18 V.13 IX.12, XIII.5
3:20 XII.16
3:24 IIR, IV.1
4:16 I.11
6:2 I.11
7:19 I.4
8:4 I.10
8:6-12 XIV.5
8:20 I.12
15:8 XII.5
25:26 X.11
31:17 XIV.7
39:10 VII.7
41:14 XIII.15
41:54-7 VI.20
- Exod. 2:10 XIV.6
3:1 XIV.6
14:16 VI.20
14:19 VI.20
14:28 XIII.9
21:2,5 XIV.2
- Exod. 28:30 XV.7
30:3 I.9
34 IX.22
34:29 VII.10
- Lev. 8:8 XV.7
13:46 IV.3
14:1-9 IV.3
16 III.7
19:15 XII.12
- Num. 22:23 XV.16
22:28 XV.13
- Deut. 32:50-52 IV.6
34:4 IV.6
- Jud. 14:6 VII.7
16:19 VII.7
16:21 XIII.12
16:23-31 XIII.13
- I Kings (III Kingdoms)
17:14 VII.20
- II Kings (IV Kingdoms)
2:11 VI.23
2:21 XI.11
6:17 XV.4
- II Chron. 26:16-21 III.14,
XII.4, XV.9
- II Macc. 7:1 VII.19

Job 1:9-11 XII.11

Psalms 16(17):8 I.15
48(49):13 XIII.5
89(90):9 VII.24
90(91):11 XII.7

Prov. 30:4 II.9

Isaiah 6:3 V.11
11:8 VII.7
22:22 XV.6
61:1 XIII.10
65:17 IX.1
66:22 IX.1

Jer. 37(LXX 44): 15-16 XIV.3
38(LXX45):6 XIV.3

Ezek. 28:13 VII.4

Dan. 1:12 VII.16
3:19-28 VI.20
3:50 VI.20
4 XIII.4
4:32-33 XIII.6
4:36 XIII.11
6:22 VI.20
9:15-19 XIV.4
12:3 I.7, VII.19

Jon. 2 XIII.14

Matt. 4:6 XII.7
5:13 VI.21
5:19 I.7
8:32 XII.13
10:14-15 VI.19
10:38 IX.2
13:25 IX.2
14:29 I.6
15:27 I.16, V.15,
VII.26
20:8 VI.18
21:19 XII.13
23:13 XII.13
27:52 VIII.11

Mark 1:25 XII.13
1:43 XII.13
5:9 V.7, XII.8
8:8 IX.29

Luke 6:24 XII.13
8:30 V.7
10:40 IX.7
15:20 XIV.7
16:19 VII.27
16:24 I.17
16:26 I.12
22:30 II.5, XI.15
23:39-43 VIII.1
23:43 IV.5, XII.10
24:31 XV.4

John 8:17 V.2
10:7 II.1
10:9 II.2
12:6 XV.15
19:34 II.R

Acts 1:9 VI.23
2:1-4 XI.14
20:9-12 VI.19

Rom. 8:21 IX.1
16:25-6 VI.22

I Cor. 3:8 I.7
10:4 V.1
14:34 VI.8

II Cor. 11:25 VI.22
12:3 VI.22

Eph. 5:27 VI.7

Phil. 3:20 XIV.7

Col. 1:25-6 VI.22
2:14 XIV.14

Heb. 9:7 III.17
9:11 IV.4
11:24 XIV.6

Index 2: Proper Names

(To Hymns and Commentary on Genesis section II;
references to subsections of the latter are prefaced by C)

- Aaron II.12
Abraham I.12, XII.5
Adam I.10, II.7, III.4.7.9.10.12.
14-17, IV.1.2.4-6, VI.4-6.9.
13.21, VIII.9.10, IX.6,
XI.1.R, XII.2.4-6.10.16-18,
XIII.3-6.12, XV.5.8-11.13;
C.1.4-18.21.22.24.26.27.29-34.
Babylon XIII.4.11, XIV.4
Balaam XV.13
Behemoth C.18
Cain I.11
Chaldeans IX.15
Cherubim IV.1.6, XI.3, XIV.9,
XV.7; C.18.36.
Daniel VII.16, XIV.4
Danube C.6
David XIII.5
Delilah VII.7
Eden I.1, IV.10, V.5, VI.19,
VII.5.8.10.20, IX.1.2.13, X.3,
XI.12.15, XII.10, XIV.4.7.15;
C.5.6.36
Egypt (Egyptians) VI.20,
XIII.9, XIV.6
Elias (Elijah) VI.24, VII.20
Elisha XV.4
Emmaus XV.4
Enosh I.11
Euphrates C.6
Eve III.4, IV.5, VI.8.9, XII.16,
XIII.12, XV.5.13; C.11.13.
15-22.24-26.28-34
Gehenna I.13.17, VII.28.29
Gihon C.6
Hebrews I.1, IV.3
Iscaiot XV.14
Israel C.15
Jacob XI.11, XIV.7
Jeremiah XIV.3
Job XII.11
Jonah XIII.14
Joseph VII.7, XIII.15
Jordan IV.6
Judas XV.15
Lazarus I.12, VII.27
Leviathan C.18
Martha IX.7
Mary (a) IV.5
Mary (b) IX.7
Moses I.1.9, II.12.13, III.17,
IV.6, V.2, VII.10, IX.22,
XIV.6; C.15
Nazirite VII.7
Nebuchadnezzar XIII.4.11
Nile C.6
Noah II.12, XIV.5; C.3
Nod I.11
Paradise *passim*
Pharoah XIV.6
Pishon C.6
Qardu I.10
Sabbath C.1.2
Samson VII.7, XIII.12.13
Satan XII.11, XIII.12, XIV.11.
15, XV.15; C.16.18.19.32
Seraphim III.15, XIII.16,
XIV.9; C.18
Seth I.11
Sheol VI.19, VIII.10.11
Simon (Peter) I.6
Sinai II.12.13
Sodom I.12, VI.19
Tigris C.6
Uzziah III.14, XII.4, XV.9.10

Index 3: Subjects

- Abyss I.12.13
Adam as image VI.5, XII.15, XIII.4; as king III.14, XIII.3.4.6.
Altar I.9
Angel (Watcher) VI.20.23.24, VII.8.15; C.18
Animals II.12, III.4, VI.20, XII.16.19.20, XIII.3.5.7.10; C.4.9-11.
13.15.18.29.33
Apostle I.7.14, VI.22, VII.15, XI.14; C.27
Ark I.10, II.12.13, XIV.5
Ark of Covenant VI.1
Birds II.12, III.4; C.9.10
Bitter, bitterness VI.9, VII.6.14, IX.2, X.15, XI.10, XII.3, XV.12.
13.15
Body III.6.12.14, V.8, VI.23, VII.1.5.12.19, VIII.2-9.11, IX.13.16.
18-21.23; C.14
Boundary (barrier, enclosure, fence; *syaga*) I.13, II.7, III.3,
IV.1.6-8, V.15, VII.26-8, VIII.11, XI.3.13; C.7.
Breeze, wind III.2, IX.7-13, XI.12
Bridal chamber (*gnona*) I.6, VII.15.24, XIII.3.10.
Bridge V.4.5.
Captive, captivity, servitude I.13, V.13.14, VII.31, XIII.4.9.10,
XIV.1-3.6.15, XV.9
Chariot I.7, VI.23
Children I.13, IV.10, V.14, VII.7-9, VIII.5, IX.1, X.12.13,
XIV.10.13; C.30.32.
Church II.13, VI.7.9.10, XI.2
Cloud I.5.7, II.9, VI.23, IX.5, X.15, XV.5.15
Colors IV.7, V.6, VI.2, IX.27, X.10, XI.7, XV.1
Commandment III.3.5.9.13; C.7-9.14.17-21.23.26.31.32.35
Contest, struggle III.9, VI.18.24, VII.2.23, IX.1, XII.17; C.16-18.22
Cross VI.8.5, IX.2, XII.10
Crown I.9, II.7, III.9, V.5.6, VI.1.12.24, VII.3.15.19.23.24.28,
IX.1.2, X.3.7, XII.17.18, XIV.8.13
Curse VI.8, VII.8.14, IX.1.12, XI.9.11.13, XII.3.14, XIII.5,
XIV.4.15; C.6.23.29-31.35

- Darkness I.15, II.3, V.15, VII.15, XIII.9; C.3
 Death V.14, VII.2.19, XIII.5.11.13, XIV.2; C.20.26.30.32.35
 Demons V.7, XII.8.13.14
 Dew VI.20, VII.3.16, IX.4.6.8, X.2.15, XV.17.
 Divinity C.20.21.23.26.27
 Door, gate II.1.2, III.13, VI.2, VII.R, VIII.11, XII.13, XIII.3,
 XV.2.3.6
 Ear VI.3.18, VII.6.13.29, XIV.2, XV.13; C.17.20
 Earth II.9, V.13, VI.23.24, IX.1.12.26, X.5, XI.10.13, XIV.1.4.7;
 C.1-4.6.9.10.23.31.35
 Ephod XV.8.9
 Eye I.8, III.6.7, V.4, VI.3, VII.2.13, IX.27, XI.8, XV.4 C.15.17.
 18.20.22
 Faith I.7
 Fast II.5, VI.3.20; C.18
 Fig II.7, III.13, VII.6, XI.8, XII.10.13.14
 Fire I.17, VI.4.24, VII.19, IX.14.15, X.15, XII.11; C.24.32
 Flowers V.6, VI.12.13, VII.17.21, IX.5, X.3.6.8-10.13, XI.9
 Flood I.4
 Foothills (of Paradise) I.4.10, II.10
 Fountain, spring I.17, II.8, VII.14.20, X.6, XI.1.11.12, XII.15,
 XIII.2; C.1.3.6
 Fragrance, scent I.5, II.8.13, IV.7, V.6, VI.4, VII.3.10.21, IX.6.17.27,
 XI.9.12.13.15, XV.17
 Free-will VI.10.13.15, VII.31, XII.18
 Fruit(s) III.5.7.8.13, V.15, VI.6.8.10-13.15, VII.3.9.16.17.21.26,
 VIII.10, IX.4-6, X.2.5-7.10-13, XII.3, XIV.8.13.14, XV.5.8.9.11.
 12; C.17.20.21.25-7.30.31.34.36
 Furnace VI.4.20, XII.11
 Glory, robe (etc.) of II.7; cf III.15, VI.9; C.4.14.17.34.35
 Grace I.10.15, IV.R, V.12.15, VI.23, VII.25-27, X.14.15, XI.6.9.15,
 XII.R.12.18, XIII.1.R.2, XIV.4.14.15; C.17.30
 Harbor II.13, VI.25, XI.2, XIV.5.10
 Hidden, hiddenness I.1.2.15, VI.25, VII.12, VIII.3, IX.25, X.1,
 XI.5, XII.16, XV.1.2.
 Holy of Holies III.7.9.14.17, IV.2
 Hosanna VIII.11, XI.2, XIV.R
 Immortal, immortality C.17.23.35.36
 Just, righteous I.13, II.5.6.11, V.6.7.8, VI.11.13.16, VIII.11, IX.1.8,
 X.R
 Justice I.R., III.R.5, V.12, VII.25.27, XII.12.19, XIV.14; C.17.18.30
 Key II.2, III.5, VI.1, VII.1.R, VIII.2, X.8, XV.4.6

- Kingdom I.7, II.5, VII.24, VIII.R, XI.15, XIII.15, XIV.R
 Law I.1, III.16, VI.1; C.7-9.14.17.
 Leaves II.7, III.2, VI.9, XI.8, XII.10 C.14.33
 Legion (Mark 5) V.7.8, XII.8.9
 Leprosy, leprous III.14, IV.3.4, XII.4.13, XV.9.12
 Light I.5, V.14, VII.13, IX.25, XI.2
 Light, robe (etc.) of VII.5.24, IX.28, XIV.8
 sons of I.6.12.14, VII.15.19.25
 Love I.2, VI.25, IX.21.28, XII.8; C.29
 Marriage, married state VII.8.9.15.18, X.12, XV.11
 Marriage feast IX.7.9, XI.14, XIV.8
 Martyr VII.19
 Mind, intellect I.3, III.1, V.4.10, VI.2.13.15.25, VIII.1, XI.7, XII.11,
 XV.3.6.9; C.15
 Mirror IV.9
 Months X.2-10
 Moon I.8, X.8.9
 Mountain I.4.10, IX.22; C.18
 Naked, nakedness II.7, III.6.9.14.15, IV.5, VI.4, VII.5.6, XII.4;
 C.14.15.27.33
 Old age VII.10, X.9.12.13, XI.1
 Pillar VI.20, IX.16
 Priest II.12, III.16, IV.3.4 (of Christ), XIII.13 (of Christ), XV.7-9
 Prophet I.7.14, VII.15
 Resurrection IV.6, V.8, VII.2, VIII.7.9, IX.1, XII.19
 Rich Man (Luke 16) I.12.17, VII.27
 River X.13, XI.11; C.6.7
 Rock I.6, V.1
 Salt VI.21, XI.11
 Sanctuary III.5.14.17, XII.4, XV.7.8.12
 Scripture ('the book') V.2-6, VI.1.2, VIII.1, XII.7, XV.7; *C passim*
 Sea I.8, II.6, IV.2, VI.5.20.22, IX.16, XII.13.14, XIII.9; C.6.17
 Senses VI.2, VIII.6, IX.17
 Serpent III.4.8.12.15, IV.4, VI.8.9, VII.6, XI.9, XII.2.3, XV.13.14.16;
 C.15.16.18-23.25.26.28-30.32
 Slopes (of Paradise) II.10.11, IV.8, X.3
 'Sons of God' I.11
 Soul IV.9, VII.5.7.12.25, VIII.1-9.11, IX.16.18-21.23, XI.12, XIV.9;
 C.4.15
 Summit I.14, II.11.12, III.1, IV.8, V.5, X.3
 Sun III.2
 Sweet, sweetness I.9, VI.6, VII.14, IX.2, XI.10, XII.3

Sword II.R, IV.1, VII.19; C.36
Tabernacle III.5.6.13.16, IV.2, VIII.2, XV.5
Table II.5, VII.24.26, XI.15, XIII.2
Temptation, tempt III.10, VII.1, XII.11; C.16-18.20.23.26.33
Thief (good) IV.5, VIII.1-3
Thought V.8.10, IX.19.28, XII.1, XV.16
Tree of Knowledge III.3.5.6.10.13.14, IV.1, VI.7, IX.3, XII.2.4.10.
15, XV.2.5.8.12; C.5.8.16-20.23.27.31.35
Tree of Life III.2, XII.15; C.5.17.18.22.23.29.31.35.36
Trinity C.34
Truth I.15, VI.6.25, XII.3.7, XV.16
Valley I.10, IV.8
Veil III.5.7.13
Virgin, virginity VI.12.24, VII.6.15.18, XIV.11
Water I.17, II.9, V.1, VI.4, XI.11; C.3.6
Waves VI.5, IX.17.23.24, X.13
Wisdom II.2, VI.18, VII.3, VIII.8, IX.23.26-28, XII.1.15.17;
C.9.14.15.27
Youth VII.7.21, X.12.13

The Hymn of the Pearl
(The Hymn of Judas Thomas the Apostle
in the Country of the Indians)
Translated by G.R.S. Mead

I.

When, a quite little child, I was dwelling
In the House of my Father's Kingdom,

And in the wealth and the glories
Of my Up-bringers I was delighting,

From the East, our Home, my Parents
Forth-sent me with journey-provision.

Indeed from the wealth of our Treasure,
They bound up for me a load.

Large was it, yet was it so light
That all alone I could bear it.

II.

Gold from the Land of Beth-Ellaya,
Silver from Gazak the Great,

Chalcedonies of India,
Iris-hued [Opals?] from Kāshan.

They girt me with Adamant [also]
That hath power to cut even iron.

My Glorious Robe they took off me
Which in their love they had wrought me,

And my Purple Mantle [also]
Which was woven to match with my stature.

III.

And with me They [then] made a compact;
In my heart wrote it, not to forget it:

"If you go down into Egypt,
And thence you bring the one Pearl --

"[The Pearl] that lies in the Sea,
Hard by the loud-breathing Serpent --

"[Then] shalt Thou put on thy Robe
And thy Mantle that goeth upon it,

"And with thy Brother, Our Second,
Shall thou be Heir in our Kingdom."

IV.

I left the East and went down
With two Couriers [with me];

For the way was hard and dangerous,
For I was young to tread it.

I traversed the borders of Maishan,
The mart of the Eastern merchants,

And I reached the Land of Babel,
And entered the walls of Sarbâg.

Down further I went into Egypt;
And from me parted my escorts.

V.

Straightway I went to the Serpent;
Near to his lodging I settled,

To take away my Pearl
While he should sleep and should slumber.

Lone was I there, yea, all lonely;
To my fellow-lodgers a stranger.

However I saw there a noble,
From out of the Dawn-land my kinsman,

A young man fair and well favored,
Son of Grandees; he came and he joined me.

VI.

I made him my chosen companion,
A comrade, for sharing my wares with.

He warned me against the Egyptians,
Against mixing with the unclean ones.

For I had clothed me as they were,
That they might not guess I had come

From afar to take off the Pearl,
And so rouse the Serpent against me.

VII.

But from some occasion or other
They learned I was not of their country.

With their wiles they made my acquaintance;
Yea, they gave me their victuals to eat.

I forgot that I was a King's son,
And became a slave to their king.

I forgot all concerning the Pearl
For which my Parents had sent me;

And from the weight of their victuals
I sank down into a deep sleep.

VIII.

All this that now was befalling,
My Parents perceived and were anxious.

It was then proclaimed in our Kingdom,
That all should speed to our Gate --

Kings and Chieftains of Parthia,
And of the East all the Princes.

And this is the counsel they came to:
I should not be left down in Egypt.

And for me they wrote out a Letter;

And to it each Noble his Name set:

IX.

"From Us -- King of Kings, thy Father,
And thy Mother, Queen of the Dawn-land,

"And from Our Second, thy Brother --
To thee, Son, down in Egypt, Our Greeting!

"Up an arise from thy sleep,
Give ear to the words of Our Letter!

"Remember that thou art a King's son;
See whom thou hast served in thy slavery.

Bethink thyself of the Pearl
For which thou didst journey to Egypt.

X.

"Remember thy Glorious Robe,
Thy Splendid Mantle remember,

"To put on and wear as adornment,
When thy Name may be read in the Book of the Heroes,

"And with Our Successor, thy Brother,
Thou may be Heir in Our Kingdom."

My Letter was [surely] a Letter
The King had sealed up with His Right Hand,

Against the Children of Babel, the wicked,
The tyrannical Daimons of Sarbāg.

XI.

It flew in the form of the Eagle,
Of all the winged tribes the king-bird;

It flew and alighted beside me,
And turned into speech altogether.

At its voice and the sound of its winging,
I waked and arose from my deep sleep.

Unto me I took it and kissed it;
I loosed its seal and I read it.

As it stood in my heart writ,
The words of my Letter were written.

XII.

I remembered that I was a King's son,
And my rank did long for its nature.

I bethought me again of the Pearl,
For which I was sent down to Egypt.

And I began [then] to charm him,
The terrible loud-breathing Serpent.

I lulled him to sleep and to slumber,
Chanting o'er him the Name of my Father,

The Name of our Second, [my Brother],
And [Name] of my Mother, the East-Queen.

XIII.

And [thereon] I snatched up the Pearl,
And turned to the House of my Father.

Their filthy and unclean garments
I stripped off and left in their country.

To the way that I came I betook me,
To the Light of our Home, to the Dawn-land.

On the road I found [there] before me,
My Letter that had aroused me --

As with its voice it had roused me,
So now with its light it did lead me --

XIV.

On fabric of silk, in letter of red [?],
With shining appearance before me [?],

Encouraging me with its guidance,
With its love it was drawing me onward.

I went forth; through Sarbāg I passed;
I left Babel-land on my left hand;

And I reached unto Maishan the Great,
The meeting-place of the merchants,

That lieth hard by the Sea-shore.

XV.

My Glorious Robe that I'd stripped off,
And my Mantle with which it was covered,

Down from the Heights of Hyrcania,
Thither my Parents did send me,

By the hands of their Treasure-dispensers
Who trustworthy were with it trusted.

Without my recalling its fashion, --
In the House of my Father my childhood had left it,--

At once, as soon as I saw it,
The Glory looked like my own self.

XVI.

I saw it in all of me,
And saw me all in [all of] it, --

That we were twain in distinction,
And yet again one in one likeness.

I saw, too, the Treasurers also,
Who unto me had down-brought it,

Were twain [and yet] of one likeness;
For one Sign of the King was upon them --

Who through them restored me the Glory,
The Pledge of my Kingship [?].

XVII.

The Glorious Robe all-bespangled
With sparkling splendor of colors:

With Gold and also with Beryls,
Chalcedonies, iris-hued [Opals?],

With Sardis of varying colors.
To match its grandeur [?], moreover, it had been completed:

With adamantine jewels
All of its seams were off-fastened.

[Moreover] the King of Kings' Image
Was depicted entirely all o'er it;

And as with Sapphires above
Was it wrought in a motley of colour.

XVIII.

I saw that moreover all o'er it
The motions of Gnosis abounding;

I saw it further was making
Ready as though for to speak.

I heard the sound of its Music
Which it whispered as it descended [?]:

"Behold him the active in deeds!
For whom I was reared with my Father;

"I too have felt in myself
How that with his works waxed my stature."

XIX.

And [now] with its Kingly motions
Was it pouring itself out towards me,

And made haste in the hands of its Givers,
That I might [take and] receive it.

And me, too, my love urged forward
To run for to meet it, to take it.

And I stretched myself forth to receive it;
With its beauty of color I decked me,

And my Mantle of sparkling colors
I wrapped entirely all o'er me.

XX.

I clothed me therewith, and ascended
To the Gate of Greeting and Homage.

I bowed my head and did homage
To the Glory of Him who had sent it,

Whose commands I [now] had accomplished,
And who had, too, done what He'd promised.

[And there] at the Gate of His House-sons
I mingled myself with His Princes;

For He had received me with gladness,
And I was with Him in His Kingdom;

XXI.

To whom the whole of His Servants
With sweet-sounding voices sing praises.

* * * * *

He had promised that with him to the Court
Of the King of Kings I should speed,

And taking with me my Pearl
Should with him be seen by our King.

The Hymn of Judas Thomas the Apostle,
which he spoke in prison, is ended.